

Review

Education and school leavers' unemployment saga: Implication for educational planning in Nigeria

Aja Sunday Nwambam* and Prisca Ijeoma Eze

Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty of Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Nigeria.

Received 6 March, 2017; Accepted 26 April, 2017

This paper reviewed the relationship between the type of education and school leavers' unemployment with the view to highlighting its implications for educational planning in Nigeria. The concept of education, reasons for steady increase in the number of unemployed school leavers and what to do in order to curb educated unemployment were discussed. The reviewed works show that the rapid extension of formal education as a result of the Universal Basic Education and other forms of free education schemes of federal and state governments in Nigeria has itself been a significant factor in the growth of widening youth unemployment in Nigeria. The review however noted that school leavers' unemployment can be reduced by making classroom education relevant to the society in which pupils and students build their careers. Another way of curbing youth unemployment is that government programmes for out-of-school education should be more attuned to the economic realities of the state or country as the case may be. The implication of this to the education planners is that they should be more proactive in identifying the unemployment problems, analyzing their relationships to the education system and the economy so that they can determine policy options.

Key words: Education, school-leavers, educational planning, unemployment in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Education has been severally conceived as not only a mean for life but life itself because it carries with it all that is necessary for one to live in the society one finds him or herself. It is in the light of this that Okobia et al. (2013) opined that education is not just the machinery for transmitting the cultural heritage but a mean through which the entire person is developed so as to live successfully in the society. Conventionally, education is the process through which worthwhile knowledge, skills, values, morals and norms of the society is transmitted to its members from one generation to another. Education embodies the national goals and aspirations of a state,

nation or country. Nigeria like any other countries of the world has adopted education as instrument par excellence for affecting national development hence enshrining the citizens' alienable right to education in the constitution. The National policy on education is another bold step by the federal government on ensuring that education is continually reviewed to guarantee its adequacy and relevance to the national needs and objectives bearing in mind that education is a dynamic instrument of change (FRN, 2013: 1). The importance of education to the nation's growth and development cannot be over-emphasized; hence, every government aspires to

*Corresponding author. E-mail: saja4net@gmail.com. Tel: 08037407461.

provide good education to the citizens. The success of a good education is invariably dependent on good planning. Planning is the first step against failure of an enterprise such as with education policies and programmes.

Planning is a systematic process of foresighted activities aimed at finding out and assuring appropriate future actions, matching ends with available means through a sequence of prioritized choices taking into cognizance the prevailing, anticipated and dynamic environment with the sole aim of achieving stated goals based on public needs (Nwadiani, 2015). This implies that planning is the preparation for a project quite in advance in order to execute it to its logical conclusion with minimal problems. Obasan and Yomi (2011) opine that manpower approach should be applied in education planning to address the unemployment problem among educated youths. They maintained that the approach attempt to integrate economic development into educational planning. It is a conscious attempt to link the development of the educational system to the demand for educated manpower by the economies. Manpower also known as human resource is the bulk of labour available for any particular kind of work. In other words, it is the available human being with relevant skills, energies, talents, knowledge and attitude that can be committed towards the production of goods and services. That is why there is a saying that to fail to plan is to plan to fail.

Every successive administration in Nigeria whether military or civilian has made concerted efforts towards making education accessible to the entire citizenry with the belief that massive increase in formal education would help to generate economic growth and self-fulfillment. That is why Delacroix (1978) said that education has multiple functions to perform: passing on cultural values, developing critical minds, training specialized skills but noted that the promise of education cannot be fulfilled if school leavers and university graduates become dissatisfied, disillusioned and abject because they cannot put their ability to work. This is evident world over especially in the developing countries where majority of the young people after completing different stages of schooling do not find gainful employment. It therefore not a doubt that the rapid expansion of formal education has been a significant factor in the rising incidences of unemployment among school-leavers. This situation is described as educated (school-leavers) unemployment. Largely, the phenomenon is increasing as it is evident that each year the numbers of school-leavers keep on rising without equivalent increase in the economies to provide jobs. The question in everybody's lips is how can education be redirected to the economic and social realities of the present day Nigeria? In particular, what type of education will have a more direct effect on generating employment for the teeming youths? These are food for thought to the educational planners in Nigeria and world over.

OVERVIEW OF SYSTEM OF EDUCATION AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIAN

The introduction of formal education in Nigeria dates back to 1842 when the Wesleyan Methodist Mission established the first primary school in Badagry. However, the type of education provided then was intended only to serve clerical staff needs of the colonial government which gave rise to schooling for white-collar job mentality in Nigeria. After independence in 1960, Nigerian government tried to restructure her system of education by borrowing the American 6-3-3-4 education system. This precipitated the setting up of a body in 1973 to articulate a national policy on education that will reflect the yearning and aspirations of Nigerians. The policy gave legal framework to the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria where a child is expected to spend six years in primary school before entering into junior secondary school (JSS). After three years of JSS, students who are not able to continue to senior secondary school (SSS) may go to an apprenticeship system or some other scheme for out-of-school vocational training while the SSS will be for those who are able and willing to have a complete six-year secondary education. At this point, government was not proactive in the provision of educational opportunities for those who cannot continue upto senior secondary school and in order not to be seen as weakling students are cowed into entering the senior secondary school without sound academic prowess. This to a large extent predisposes such students to unemployment after graduation since they will come out not having sound certificate or at worst end up immersed in examination malpractices. The last four year of higher education is supposed to be devoted to teaching and research relevant to national development and particularly in development of high level manpower. The problem here is that the universities which supposed to be the highest citadel of learning, has been highly politicized in areas of funding, location, admission and appointment. Tonnwe et al. (2015) noted that government's interference in all aspects of higher education because it is funded by her has left many institutions hostage to the factional policies with decisions on establishment of schools, student selection, appointments and promotions, etc., made on political grounds rather than professional or academic merit. It is on basis of this that Nwadiani (2015) asserts that the way politics is played in Nigeria and translated into education is largely responsible for the paradox of our age as its manifestations are that we have more degrees and certificates but less sense; more knowledge, but less judgment; read and pray too seldom, but watch too much television; and we desire God's love, but we hate others. What an irony? This is the bane policies in Nigerian education system.

Most recently, the introduction of the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in 1999 brought about an astronomical increase in pupils and students enrolment in

primary and junior secondary schools and even in senior secondary schools as some states in Nigeria such as Ebonyi made senior secondary education free. The programme though laudable has exacerbated the unemployment saga as many people including market men and women cued into the programme; hence they come out to parade certificates in offices looking for white-collar jobs. There is no gain stating the obvious that people pursue formal education with the intension to get good job to enhance, their living condition but the irony is that the more people go into formal education the more people who will be looking for jobs which are not forthcoming. Another amazing side of it is that some school leavers lack the requisite knowledge and skills for some industrial and technological based jobs a condition normally referred to as having wrong kind of education. It is in this regards that Tabotndip (2010) emphasized on the need for education to be relevant and dynamic enough to meet the demands of the recipients and nation at large. He maintained that where education fails to be dynamic, the recipients acquire skills which may not be relevant for economic ventures. Another aspect of wrong kind of education arises when policy emphasizes on one type of discipline, thereby over producing graduates who will be out of work. School-leavers' unemployment therefore refers to a condition whereby the school system produce more graduates than the number of employment in the economy. However, unemployment generally is described as the population of persons aged 15 to 64 who during the reference period, were available for work, actively seeking for work (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 1976) in Udo (2017). This implies that 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. It is usually classified into open and disguised unemployment. Open unemployment 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 (Ogege, 2011). The magnitude of unemployment rate is very high especially in urban areas as people in rural areas are usually self-employed in their farms and other vocations. In Nigeria with a population of over 150 million people, about 75 million are youths either in schools and/or in the labour market. The National Bureau of Statistics data as reported by Udo (2017) indicates that 15.2 million youths remain unemployed or underemployed. This number falls under the school-leavers or school drop-outs roaming the streets of major cities and towns including the uneducated in the rural villages. Similarly, Tunji (2014) reported that half of about 167 million people in Nigeria according to National Bureau of Statistics in 2012 and National Population Commission in 2013 is made up of youth

(individuals between 15 and 34 years of age). The report showed that about 11.1 million youths were unemployed in 2012. The breakdown of the percentage of the unemployed youths revealed that over 50% of all unemployed youth did not have an education above primary school; about 30% are secondary school leavers while about 20% are graduates of tertiary institutions who have remained unemployed for upward of five years after graduation (NISER, 2013) (Figure 1).

Several factors were advanced by researchers as responsible for the prevalence of youth unemployment in Nigeria. The factors are high population growth rate which is about 3.5% per annum, deficient school curriculum and poor quality of educational resources. Some experts attributed the high number of secondary school leavers as a result of the mass failure in the 2010 senior secondary school certificate in Nigeria. Other factors include: inadequate information and data for effective planning and lack of vibrant industries to absorb unemployed school leavers as a result of debilitating infrastructural deficit and souring economic recession in Nigeria. This situation calls for urgent attention of educational planners considering the fact that an idle hand is the devil's workshop.

THE NEXUS OF UNEMPLOYED SCHOOL-LEAVER IN NIGERIA

Many brilliant and talented persons have been lost to other nations in quest for greener pastures. Akindele (2010) in Obasan and Yomi (2011) noted that poor reward system for workers in Nigeria services as disincentive to work which compels best brains to seek for well-paid jobs outside the shores of Nigeria. Similarly, Obasan and Yomi (2011) observed that the younger generations are no longer interested in human capacity building due to the 'get rich quick' syndrome which inhibits youths from being alienable to employability skills acquisition and development. This has no doubt exposed the youths to all forms of vices. Delacroix (1978) noted that when the educational system are not sufficiently in harmony with the ability of the economies to absorb educated youths in productive work, the following conditions abounds: High social and economic cost; inequality gap in wealth (the rich get richer, while the poor get poorer); rural urban migration; juvenile delinquency and crime; physical ill-health; mental disturbance and resort to drugs. This justifies what is happening in Nigeria today ranging from militancy, insurgency, kidnapping to robbery which were mostly traceable to unemployed youths. It is also on record that youths who are mostly school leavers constitute about two third of the total population in Nigeria and has about 60% of them who live below poverty line, hence, they face problems such as non-access to quality education, unemployment, exposure to violence and vulnerability to sexual as well

Percentage			
100	Primary sch./below	Secondary school	Post-secondary sch.
90			
80			
70			
60			
50			
40			
30			
20			
10			
0			

Figure 1. National Youth Unemployment figures by education in 2012 (National Institute of Social and Economic (NISER), 2013).

as reproductive health related challenges (Onuoha, 2017).

The relationship between the type of education children are exposed to and their future live is so intractable and inseparable that something urgently needed to be done to safe guide future of the youth through proper planning and implementation of educational policies and programmes in Nigeria and world at large. It is true that reforms within formal education alone cannot solve the problem of unemployed school leavers. Even if imaginative changes are made in methods of instruction and content of courses at varying level of education, young people will still face the harsh realities of the labour market. Unless the youths are ready to do farm work, artisan and other professional jobs; the number of unemployed school leavers will continue to rise. Education as an integral part of the process of social and economic development will be geared toward drastic modifications in the functioning of national economies. Educational planners will take on a wider role in aligning education more closely with the nation’s new economic strategies and development policies of the government. Adjustments within the formal education in accordance with national objectives and search for economies in public and private expenditures on education while maintaining or improving quality must be a continuous exercise in the nation’s education system. Obasan et al. (2011) averred that the Nigerian educational system is over-producing the real manpower need for required national development; hence, they recommend that school work- based learning should be incorporated in studies in higher institution as an integral part of manpower planning and development strategy to reduce the burden of unemployment and poverty among youths. This could be facilitated through the education planners ensuring that curriculum at all levels of the education system in Nigeria is creative/knowledge-based, Information Communication Technology (ICT) compliance

and vocational based to move the country to a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens as enunciated in the national policy on education (FRN, 2013: 7).

Many researchers have tried to investigate the major causes of unemployment among secondary school leavers and university graduates with the view to finding out ways of circumventing it. It was found out that the causes of unemployment generally are complex and interwoven as it vary from one country to another so also the solution to be approached according to local or national peculiarities. Some researchers were of the view that nothing should be done because time shall take care of jobless educated youths. They argue that the aspirations of school leavers are out of alignment with employment opportunities and that, given time for them to encounter with the realities of life, they will revise their expectations and establish themselves with the available jobs or settle within modest probably rural or family enterprises. Another school of thought were of the opinion that school leavers are often too young, lazy or too inexperienced but maintained that when provided with suitable training and work opportunities, will work hard to win their way forward according to their innate talents. Similarly, others argue that school leavers do not want to work with their hands except white-collar jobs. This is true because youths shun working on farms and within other village occupations for their poor prospects. It is also contended that the more a government tries to do to solve unemployment among educated youth, the more it is required to do. This situation holds true when major developments are confined to cities without serious plan for improvements in rural work opportunities and living conditions. The “take no action” view as a solution to the problem of school leavers’ unemployment cannot hold especially in the face of the socio-economic conditions in Nigeria and world over. It is imperative that immediate and far- reaching actions should be taken by government through proper planning of the education system.

WAY FORWARD

The following measures could help in curbing unemployment of school-leavers in Nigeria:

- (1) Radical curriculum reforms to relate education more closely to communities and national life,
- (2) Effective implementation of vocational and/or entrepreneurship studies at various levels of the education system.
- (3) General transformation of the economy through positive attitudinal change and holistic fight against corruption.
- (4) Proper funding of education through economic diversification.
- (5) Above all, complete over-hauling of the education system through institutional strengthening of educational policy planning and programme implementation.

Magdy (2014) in his contributions advocated for a four prong approach to reducing youth unemployment in the global perspectives, this include: capacity development; advocacy and mainstreaming; encouraging youth leadership and strengthening the national policy framework. The whole lot on the educational planners, is that the implication is that the right people who are experienced in educational planning should be engaged. There should be robust system of data collection to aid planning and government interferences in educational policy planning and implementation should be regulated through legislation.

CONCLUSION

Education is intractably related to employment because it is the driving force in manpower development. The type of education provided to people determine the type of labour force in a given place and time. It is obvious that the massive provision of formal education is the bane of the unemployment saga in Nigeria but the gains of literacy far outweigh illiteracy. Therefore, education is also capable of producing the needed change in people when we are able to identify where we have gone wrong and are willing to do it right.

It is down to every stakeholder in education to do the needful in order to have the type of education that will provide work to its recipients. Educational planners should be on top of the move while governments on their own should exhibit the right political will to provide a robust economy for quality education to thrive.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflicts of interests.

REFERENCES

- Delacroix E (1978). Educational planning and unemployed youth. International Institute of Educational Planning (IIEP), Paris: UNESCO.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013). National Policy on Education. Abuja: National Educational Research Development Centre (NERDC).
- Magdy M (2014). United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) Youth strategy 2014-2017. Bureau for policy and programme support, UNDP.
- Nwadiani, M. (2015). Planning dimensions of educational policy and programme politics in Nigeria. Lead paper at Nigerian Association for Educational Administration and Planning (NAEAP) 34th Annual national conference proceedings on politics of education and national development in Nigeria.
- Obasan KA, Yomi A (2011). Manpower planning and education in Nigeria: Between hope and hopelessness. Euro. J. Humanities Soc. Sci. 8(1).
- Ogege SO (2011). Education and the paradox of graduate unemployment: The dilemma of development in Nigeria. Afr. Res. Rev. 5(1).
- Okobia FN, Banwunna ED, Osajie JN (2013). Religious education vital tool for achieving excellence in teacher education in Nigeria in the 21st century. Delta: CEE Emmy Ventures pp. 70-84.
- Onuoha M (2017). Youth education key to development. Abuja: The nation Newspaper. Wednesday March 8, 2017.
- Tabotndip JE (2010). Planning in Education. Onitsha: West and Solomon Publishing Co Ltd.
- Tonwe, UAC, Ojogho J, Ogeleka AI (2015). Politics of Higher Education Policies and Programmes in Nigeria. NAEAP 34th Annual national conference proceedings publications on politics of education and national development in Nigeria.
- Tunji A (2014). Youth unemployment in Nigeria: The state of youth unemployment in Nigeria. Africa in focus. Tuesday September 23, 2014.
- Udo B (2017). National Bureau of Statistics report on unemployment rate in Nigeria. Premium Times. Sunday February, 2017. Abuja.