

Economic Empowerment: a Vital Business Strategy for Reducing Technical Education Graduate Unemployment Rate and Promoting Self-Reliance in South-South Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria as one of the world's highest economic growth rates (averaging 7.4% over the last decade), with well developed economy and preponderance of natural resources such as oil, solid minerals, fertile land and fertile minds, however, in spite of these it remains one of the countries with the highest rate of graduate unemployment. Thus, while few are stupendously rich, multitude still wallow in abject poverty and are enduring dehumanizing living conditions. The focus of this paper was on a review of the need of economic empowerment a vital business strategy for reducing Technical Education Graduate Unemployment rate and promoting self-reliance in south-south Nigeria. The paper highlighted the need for economic empowerment, it also pointed out some salient business skills needed for graduate students in vocational education and the need for self-reliance and unemployment reduction among graduates. The paper highlighted some root causes of unemployment among vocational education graduates and effect of these problems on economic development of the country with particular reference to vocational education graduates. Nigeria. Possible solutions to these problems were also recommended.

Keywords:

Economic,
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Background to the Study

Economic empowerment is the capacity of women and men to participate in, contribute to and benefit from growth processes in ways that recognise the value of their contributions, respect their dignity and make it possible to negotiate a fairer distribution of the benefits of growth. Vocational education graduates have the potential to change their own economic status, as well as that of the communities and countries in which they live. Yet more often than not, women's economic contributions go unrecognized, their work undervalued and their promise undernourished. The National Population Commission (2001) recorded it that graduate under the age of 30 constitute over half of the approximately 180 million Nigerians. According to Doreo Partners (2013) unemployment rate in Nigeria is growing at the rate of 20% per year with the youth impacted the most and accounting for three times the general unemployment. In Nigeria, the escalation in graduate unemployment has risen to 45% and these have resulted to most anti social problems in the society such as Boko Haram, Niger delta unrest.

In recent times Nigeria has witness series of changes in the in vocations and technical skills to aid industrial development and craftsmanship in the society. Sequel to the aforementioned problem the national Directorate of Employment, Nigeria University Commission and national business and technical examination board has jump start programmes to arrest the abnormal situation and one of the panaceas adopted by these three units of government agencies is entrepreneurship. Both past and present research have centred on challenges and issues involved in integrating entrepreneurship by empowering youths in order to promote self reliance in the economy.

Self-reliance is connected with self-help, independence, mutual-help, indigenous participation and rural development. It advocates the need for people to improve their condition using local initiatives and resources in their own hands. The concept is fast being accepted as a new formula for community development and graduate empowerment because of its widespread acceptance in the development planning of most African countries. The concept of self-reliance has the tendency to give greater stimulus and cohesiveness to community development in these countries (Anyanwu, 1992). Fonchingong and Fonjong (2003) self-reliance is situated within the discourse of community development and is connected to related concepts like self-help, mutual help, indigenous participation and rural development. It champions the need for people to better their lots using local strategies and resources at their disposal. The definition assumes that youth use the resources at their disposal to proffer solutions to the challenges peculiar to their group and confronting them persistently. They also want to realize their dreams and be at the fore front of developing the communities.

Anyanwu (1992) contends that in most African countries, community development has depended significantly on voluntary cooperative efforts. This follows a traditional trait that clearly underscores the virtue of self-reliance. This explains the emerging trend in community development, which sees it as an important point of take-off for better living. The emphasis is to involve groups of people in planned programmes from which they may gain skills that will enable them to cope more successfully with the problems of their everyday lives. Self-reliance is thus "development on the basis of a country's (region's) own resources, involving its

populations based on the potentials of its cultural values and traditions” (Galtung, 1980). Sandbrook (1985) has emphasized the need for “small-scale community solutions”. In its fundamental sense, self-reliance is defined as a state of mind that regards one's own mental and material resources as the primary stock to draw on in the pursuit of one's objectives, and finds emotional fulfillment not only in achieving the objectives but of having achieved them primarily by using one's own resources to curb the problem of unemployment in the society

Unemployment is a social issue that every nation deals with regularly. Even the most advanced economies still battle with the issue of unemployment. In fact the classical economists averred that there can never be a situation of total employment in any economy. However, responsible governments must strive at all times to keep unemployment rate as low as possible. According to Fajana (2000) unemployment is a state of worklessness/idleness experienced by persons who as members of the labour force perceive themselves are perceived by others as capable of work. Unemployment is a situation where those who are willing and able to work cannot find full employment or even if it is partial employment. The unemployment situation in Nigeria is unsettling. Statistic shows that almost 75% of those who are able and willing to work cannot find gainful employment, especially among young graduate/school leavers.

Vocational Education: A need for Economic Empowerment for Technical Education Graduate

Vocational Education graduates are expected to display high level of vocational skills. Although this has not been the case of recent time as graduate unemployment has been increasing because most graduates lack relevant marketable skills. The Federal government recently acknowledged that about 80 percent of Nigeria's youth are unemployed while ten percent are underemployed. The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) is the government agency empowered with the responsibility of coordinating Technical and Vocational Education and Training in the Country under Act No. 9 of 1977. And some of the mandate of the agency is to advise the federal government on and to co-ordinate all aspects of Technical and Vocational Education falling outside the Universities and to make recommendation on national policy for training technicians, craftsmen and other middle level and skilled manpower. To promote manpower development in the country the need for the establishment of Technical Institutions, College of Technology (polytechnics) and Technical Colleges to enhance skilled manpower shortage. The Nigerian Educational policy at higher level according to (Aladekomo, 2004 Fakae (2005) asserted that the focus of Technical and Vocational education is on skill acquisition and sound scientific knowledge, which empowers an individual use of hand and machine and self-reliant. Despite these well formulated policies, the Nigerian government is very worried on the increasing unemployment rate, poverty and generally bad economic condition. Importantly, different scholars are of the views that vocational and technical educations have a missing link as was asserted by Ojukwu(1999) in Onifade (2002) to further buttress this point Kazaure(2011)asserted that in spite of the existence of 100 universities and over 120 polytechnics and other similar institution as well as technical/vocational college, our educational institutions have been disconnected from our industrial and socio-economic needs.

Root causes of Unemployment among Vocational Education Graduates in South-South

Unemployment among vocational education graduates has been a major factor hindering graduate students in south-south Nigeria has been hindered by several factors such as; Poor Educational Policies and planning, Parental factors on career pursuit among graduates, Lack of potential contribution of graduate of vocational education in Nigeria and Poor budgetary allocation in Nigeria.

Poor Educational Policies and Planning

Unstructured poor educational policies and planning has led to the destabilized educational system in Nigeria which has resulted to the growth of unemployment in Nigeria. Nigerian education policies since independence and now has introduced and implemented several educational policies. These are the 7:5:2:3; the 6:3:3:4, and now the 9:3:3:4 (elementary, secondary and university). There is now a clamour for the re-introduction of Higher School Certificate (HSC) program which was a two-year post-secondary programme that prepared students for university education. This reaction followed the very poor performance of secondary school leavers (87% failure rate) in the West African Examination Council (WAEC) in 2010. One of the major problems of past education policies stems from the fact that new policies are not allowed to run their full course before they are changed. What this means is that some of the past policies may not have been well conceived before implementation.

Parental factors on career pursuit among graduates

Most graduate of vocational educational rely strongly on the parents pursuing career in the elitist professions such as medicine, law and engineering regardless of whether they have the aptitude, interest or resources. This mindset is fuelled further by loss of the age old value system which tied dignity of labour to wealth. People still perceive artisans and craftsmen as social outcasts who should remain permanently at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. Society now seen to worship wealth (regardless of the source) and churches and communities reward some of these questionable acquisitions with Kinghood and chieftaincy titles respectively.

Lack of Potential Contribution of Graduate of Vocational Education in Nigeria

The neglect of vocational/technical education has been robbing the nation of the potential contributions of its graduates to national growth and economic development, the inability of policy makers to make rational and informed decisions continue to affect the rate of progress of the Nigerian Nation. As Dike (2006a) has noted, the underdevelopment status of Nigeria could be linked to the neglect of its educational institutions. Although science and technology has been a part of Nigeria's National Policy on Primary education (NPE) since 1981 (Moja, 2000), like every other public policy, implementation have always been the major problem. Consequently, the society lacks competent artisans such as bricklayers, carpenters, printers, auto mechanics, pharmacy technicians and so on.

Poor Budgetary Allocation in Nigeria

After China and India, Nigeria is the fastest growing economy in the world with a growth rate of 7.2% (Yusuf, 2012). This figure is expected to increase to double digit growth typical of the

Asian tiger economies. This growth rate is being achieved despite the energy challenges, financial crisis and global economic meltdown. Although Nigeria's economy is projected to continue growing, poverty is likely to get worse as the gap between the rich and the poor continue to widen. One reason may be attributed to the perennial defective leadership, corruption and poorly articulated policy implementations.

Promoting Economic Empowerment in Nigeria

Promoting economic empowerment in Nigeria economic development is a strategy for alleviation of poverty and transformation of economic development is the following strategy is painstakingly addressed.

Good Governance

Governance is the ability to coordinate and promote policies, projects and programmes that credibly represent a broad range of interests. Public involvement or participatory vocational development in tertiary institutions will promote development, transparency of decision-making procedures, interest representation and conflict resolution. Good governance provides a foundation for citizens to use their talents to improve their social and economic conditions.

Business Enabling Environment

Good governance the power of self-government derived through democratic means does not guarantee success. The foundation of success is capable institutions at the local level. First, support for institutions and strategies should combine governance with culture. Second, clear decision rules and procedures are needed in government, such as effective business codes and land use zones that promote long term plans rather than politically expedient, short term decisions. Third, the political environment must be safe. Poor or corrupt economic policies and weak government systems can negatively affect local economic development by raising risks and increasing production costs.

For example, risks and production costs are affected when investment opportunities and key government posts are given to unqualified friends and relatives of the political party in power; when bribes are extorted from businessmen/contractors and entrepreneurs; holding them hostage to politicians; and when tax rates or regulations are uncertain and change with each new administration. The local government should establish a political environment in which investors and businesses feel secure. Enabling environments are achieved by simplifying bureaucratic procedures, creating regulatory certainty, pursuing broadly supported actions, encouraging local business networks and supporting training so that skilled workers are available to meet market demands.

Conclusion

The study established the need for economic empowerment as a panacea for reducing technical education graduate unemployment rate in south-south Nigeria. And the need for restructuring the curriculum contents since there is no entrepreneurship department with strict adherence to the need for vocational graduate students. This shortcoming in the curriculum has resulted in large number of unemployed graduates in the society. Finally, the study explains that most of the skills being tutored are no longer relevant to the need of the

economy. The study also pinpoints the shortcomings of the current educational system which has not given room for vocational education in the society.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were posed to serve as a way forward for graduate students in south-south Nigeria

1. The curriculum of tertiary institution should be restructured in order to capture the current reality of producing job creators and not job seekers. This could be achieved by periodical review to identify the technical and vocational skill need of the economy.
2. Adequate and reliable entrepreneurial training programmes skills should be fused into the training programme of Technical and Vocational Education which will help to foster institutional support for youth entrepreneurship programmes at the local, state and federal levels. Cheap funds made available and accessible to interested young entrepreneurs is a necessity for the development of self-reliant programmes among graduate students.
3. Government should set up an incentive scheme to attract more individuals to train as technical/vocational teachers to encourage and support a national apprenticeship scheme to enable graduate trainer to become employable.
4. Government should set a task force (including the ministry of Education and other ministerial departments; Economy, Employment, science and research) to determine how entrepreneurship can be integrated into primary, secondary and higher education.

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