

Tracking Unemployment and Promoting Entrepreneurial Development through Vocational Education among Graduate Students: a Strategy for Diversification and Sustainability in Cross River State, Nigeria

¹Arikpo Sampson Venatius, ²Ubi Ofem Usani, ³Ntui Eugene Achima & ⁴Igajah Mbah Ekpenyong
^{1,2,3 & 4}*School of Vocational and Technical Education
Cross River State College of Education Akamkpa.*

Abstract

The increasing rate of unemployment in Nigeria is fast becoming a popular subject matter. It is the ideal cynical mechanism, which accounts for why many crimes abound in the society. The quick excuse from most youth, who indulge themselves in anti-social crime, is unemployment. And for obvious reasons, it has also become the most appealing topic of deliberation in the country. This menace can be appropriately handled if entrepreneurial development is adequately encouraged through vocational education. Entrepreneurship as seen in this paper is the skill to develop new adventures or apply a new technique to an old business. It entails risks, identifies business opportunity, gathers resources, initiates action and establishes an organization or enterprise to meet such demand or market opportunity. This paper presents evidence that promoting entrepreneurship development through Vocational Education can be an effective way of tackling unemployment in Nigeria. The findings also showed that unemployment is a global problem in Nigeria and empowering the youth is a sure ways of diversifying the economic. Conclusion and recommendation were also drawn from the study.

Keywords: *Tracking Unemployment, Promoting Entrepreneurial Development, Vocational Education and Graduate students.*

Corresponding Author: Justina I. Ezenwafor, Faben

Background to the Study

Technical and vocational education plays a vital role in improving the wellbeing of graduates in Nigeria. It increases productivity, empowers individual to become self-reliant and stimulates entrepreneurship. Businesses are more willing to invest in a community with strong human resources. Chinwe, (2008). Vocational education can therefore contribute to strengthening the social links of a community by promoting employment creativity and sustainable means of subsistence. Vocational education programme has been an integral part of national development strategies in many societies because of the impact on human resources development, productivity, and economic growth. In spite of its laudable proven contribution Nigeria does not seem to give vocational education the attention it deserves; and that appears one of the reasons for the rising unemployment and poverty in the society. Vocational education is therefore the missing link for entrepreneurship development among the youths in Nigeria.

Entrepreneurship development has been an indispensable tool for economic growth and development in Nigeria. In recent times the economy has been a subject of increased attention in Nigeria and the world-over in recent years. Gibson, (2001) sees entrepreneurship as the act of using individual initiative to transform a business concept into a new venture or to grow and diversify an existing venture. Henry (2003) views entrepreneurship as the engine driving the economy of nations, creating new industries, young entrepreneurs, employments and wealth creation in the society. It involves a process directed towards creating wealth for developmental purposes and eradication of unemployment for the nations. However, entrepreneurship involves employment generation and wealth creation for human sustainability. Unemployment has been seen as a very serious challenge facing youth in Nigeria and the nation as a whole.

Essien, (2006) defined entrepreneurship as the totality of self – asserting attributes that enable a personal to identify latent business opportunities, together with capacity to organize needed resources with which to profitably take advantage of such opportunities in the face of calculated risks and uncertainty. An entrepreneur is the person who carries out the function of the entrepreneurship. In the view of Nwachukwu and Nwamuo, (2010) entrepreneurship is the ability to set up a business- enterprise as different from being employed. It involves the acquisition of skills, ideas and managerial abilities necessary for self-reliance. Entrepreneurship in any country is important for the following reasons; reducing unemployment, with the zeal of entrepreneurship very valuable jobs will be created, not just for the entrepreneurs, but also for others (George & Archibong, 2010). This will to a large extent reduce government expenditure in a way and thus contributing to a balanced budget for the economy. Going beyond employability, entrepreneurship capacities enable graduates by self-determination to create their own future, exploit the opportunities that emerge in the complex unpredictable worlds and contribute better to economic development and social well – being.

Olusakin, (2010) found that even though up-to-date statistical data are lacking, local media reports indicate that half of the Nigerian population of 148 million are youths, 95% of whom are unemployed. Decades of economic stagnation and poverty have driven a large percentage of this figure to crime and violence in their early years. The youths, when they are not gainfully employed either in the public or private sector of the economy, become very vulnerable to criminality such as kidnapping, rape, armed robbery and many other social vices which are now a menace to the society (Nwachukwu & Nwamuo, 2010).

The Federal and state governments have made several efforts through some agencies to address the issue, yet many young graduates are unemployed either in the public or private sector of the economy. Some of these young people are also unable to gain admission into the tertiary institutions and as a result, are neither at work nor in school. Therefore, they have no option than to roam about the streets in search of vanity. Akinola, (2001) stated that these youths without jobs engage in all types of vandalization and wanton destruction of lives and properties. Most government-fronted skill acquisition programmes shortly fade away after much expenditure, are of no impact on the youths. Most of these government skill acquisition efforts are not sustainable, because the beneficiaries cannot sustain their economic livelihood after the skill acquisition training and meagre start-up capital. Eradication of unemployment in society demands a combined effort of the government, parents, the schools, larger society and the youths themselves (Nwachukwu & Nwamuo, 2010).

Revitalizing Technical and Vocational Education for Youth Empowerment, Diversification and Sustainability

Globally, education is acknowledged as a means for transforming and empowering the youths with skills, knowledge and attitudes to enable them become productive members of the society. Yet Nigeria as a developing country with population of 140 million is battling with poverty and unemployment problems. Issues pertaining to integrating technical and vocational education and training in education curricula, entrepreneurial activities aimed at jobs was discussed, Youth as defined by the National Policy on Youth Development, is any Individual who is a citizen of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, between the ages of 18-35. Between 1991 and 2006, the youth population in Nigeria has grown from 22.5 million to over 30 million (International Institute for Education and Planning, 2004). This increase in youth population has also increase school enrolment levels, yet the inclusion of technical and vocational educational training is not adequately addressed (World Bank, 2005).

These young people are faced with numerous challenges ranging from unemployment and poverty. Many of those who drop out of secondary schools and those who manage to pass through, lack the skills to compete in the rather weak economy and tight labour market, therefore most of them are engaged with poverty and unemployment even after graduation from school with lucrative career. The goals of technical and vocational education according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) are to:

1. Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels.
2. Provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development.
3. Give training and impart the necessary skills to individual who shall be self reliant economically.

Though the goals of technical and vocational education as stated above are quite laudable but the implementation of the programme has fallen short of expectation. The increasing rate of unemployment and the inability of the country to provide the good things of life to her citizens are evidences in this direction. Revitalizing technical and vocational education and training in Nigeria Skill training enhances productivity and sustains competitiveness in the global economy. Worldwide countries are renewing efforts to

promote technical and vocational education and training, this is because it is the only way to prepare young people for world of work, which reaches out to the marginalized and excluded groups to engage them in income-generating livelihoods. High unemployment has been leading to increasing poverty and serious social problems in Nigeria. But developing countries including Nigeria tend to concentrate on universal primary education and literacy, but do not pay sufficient attention to skill training for youths, even though there are numerous initiatives focusing on providing education and training people. Therefore, There is the need for government to urgently consider redesigning the curricula with emphasis on skill acquisition, especially on youth empowerment.

Obstacles to youth unemployment and entrepreneurial development in Cross River State, Nigeria

The lack of institutional co-ordination and the heterogeneity of the government in power in the fight against youth unemployment are a major obstacle in Nigeria. In most states in Nigeria, the responsibility for youth employment policy is split among a wide range of ministries and agencies, often operating in isolation and with little co-ordination. The lack of a coherent strategic approach results in fragmentation of efforts and wasted resources strongly hinders the youth from being employed.

There is also the obstacle of poor data on employment matters, preventing a better understanding of what young people need to obtain good jobs and develop their entrepreneurial skills. Unemployment registers exist in some countries, but are often confined to urban areas and are not comprehensive, leaving household surveys as the only alternative to obtain comprehensive data. The lack of data makes it difficult for policy makers to understand the nature of the employment challenge and take informed decisions on how to support young people in the labour market.

Conclusion

Youth empowerment has been a serious problem in the country as most of our graduates find it difficult to cope in the labour market because of poor employment opportunities. There s great need for youth empowerment in order to secure poverty free nation for youth to become productive citizens of the society. Unemployment and global poverty are paramount issues that require immediate attention of the Nigerian government, if young people are expected to become leaders of the future. The problem has been a serious threat to national growth and development, due to their inability to fend and cater for immediate family, the possibility of achieving their full potentials cannot be actualized ended up as arm-robbers, prostitutes' scammers, or militants fighting just to engage themselves into one form of vocation or the other. Therefore, need to revitalize technical and vocational education on youth empowerment for self-actualization and employment. It is therefore imperative to note that, the world needs educated and skilled workers with Nigerian youths at the core, and technical and vocational educational education could help to curb unemployment situation in the country.

Recommendations

Tracking unemployment and promoting entrepreneurial development through vocational education among graduate students for diversification and sustainability in Cross River State, Nigeria can be enhanced based on the following recommendations:

1. A well organized entrepreneurship education should offer more than self-employment that will contribute to national development. Entrepreneurship skills can be reactivated among students at all levels of education through intensive and articulated vocational guidance and counselling services. This will help them to be psychologically ready for business venture before leaving school.
2. Unemployment can be total eradicated through entrepreneurship education in all levels of education entrepreneurship education should be introduced from the primary schools, to the secondary school down to tertiary institutions
3. Teachers of different subjects should be re-orientated and given adequate guidance on how to design lessons promoting entrepreneurship education.
4. The society should be advised to assist the government in policy implementation. Community leaders should be counseled to be involved in spreading the good-news of entrepreneurship education.
5. Government should provide essential facilities including human and material resources, workshops and in-service training to undergraduate and graduate sat all levels in the country.

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