

## ***REDUCING YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN A DEPRESSED ECONOMY THROUGH ENTREPRENEURSHIP TRAINING: THE TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL BUSINESS EDUCATION APPROACH***

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### ***Abstract***

*This paper is designed to redirect the minds of Nigerian youths on the need for entrepreneurship training via vocational and technical education in resolving youth unemployment in a depressed economy like Nigeria. The concept and the potentials of vocational and technical education are discussed. The perceptions of youth unemployment as an insurmountable societal challenge is discussed by focusing on vocational and technical skills for empowering the youths with skills that facilitate a process of job creation, wealth creation, self-reliance and economic empowerment. The concepts of youth unemployment and related areas were discussed in the paper including the causes and effects of youth unemployment. The roles that vocational and technical education may play in preparing citizens particularly the youths in addressing youth unemployment are presented. These include access to short-term and medium-term technical education and provision of centers for technical and vocational education as apprenticeship centers for uneducated, semi-educated and educated youths. In the light of these issues, the authors view vocational and technical education as effective and significant tools in ameliorating the effects of youth unemployment and expanding the frontiers of employment generation, wealth creation, and self-reliance. It recommended that vocational and technical education practitioners use their understanding of science, technology, and engineering to deal with challenges posed by youth unemployment in Nigeria.*

***Keywords:*** *Youths unemployment, depressed economy, entrepreneurship training, technical and vocational education.*

## Introduction

The challenges of youth unemployment in a depressed economy has remained one of the central issues in the national debate, and has been categorized as one of the serious impediments to social and economic progress of the country. General Muhammadu Buhari in the 2015 general elections said

*“ Youth unemployment in Nigeria was worrisome and Nigeria was sitting on the keg of gun powder waiting to explode, so we must do something quick and drastic to reverse the trend.”*

The total labour force in Nigeria is made up of all persons aged 17-65years excluding students, and retired persons. By 2015, an estimated 5.5 million of Nigerians or 7.5% were said to be unemployed, while 12.2 million or 16.6% were underemployed with about 2.2 million youths joining the labour force annually (National Bureau for Statistics, 2014).

At this critical moment of our unemployment situation, we need an educational system that will work for the country and which has the capacity of reducing unemployment in the economy by inculcating the requisite skills, competences, knowledge, attitudes and positive mind sets in the youths, towards self-reliance through self-employment. Far from the massive crave for university education with its flawed curriculum; we have to move swiftly into becoming technological producers of tangible products, than theoretical experts. China is running with her plans to create a big pool of entrepreneurs through technical skills acquisition while Germany has been described as an intern nation. Internship has been one of the reasons Germany is a model in the engagement of her youths. As these youths are caught early and trained in different trades and technical skill set even as they move into university, as at when they choose to. It is not hard to see that they get into the workplace ready and can even set up shops for themselves.

It is on this note that our minds should open and crave for the demand for vocational and technical education, and should be pursued with vigor to fight off the scourge of unemployment in the economy. Unemployment is a ticking time-bomb in the country as it has rendered many youths hopeless and made them instruments for top politicians for causing political mayhem, social unrest, and propaganda in the country. This must be

changed by reversing the poor enrollment of our children in vocational and technical schools as an aspect of education that has the capacity of acquisition of skills as well as basic scientific knowledge and exploration of career options (Dike, 2009). Chukwuma (2015) condemned the poor number of students' enrollment into trade centres and technical colleges. It is common scenario to see these students opting for the regular secondary schools or university education. One of the reasons that have been adduced for students' Luke-warmness in taking up vocational and technical studies is this wrong perception. Graduates from vocational and technical schools are looked down upon with disdain. They are made to look inferior and so discourages others from enrolling in such schools.

We applaud the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council's (NERDC) effort at overhauling our secondary school education curriculum, expunging obsolete contents and standards in the old programme and inculcation of entrepreneurial studies. This is inevitably going to impact positively in the burgeoning labour market if the entrepreneurial educations are fully practised in our schools.

While we will be the securing youths' livelihood, we will be smart to look for success stories from vocational school graduates and tell these stories as a media campaign to encourage technical and vocational learning. The time for massive retraining of our young graduates is now; it is unavoidable if we want to be relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Conceptual issues and review of literature**

Technical and vocational education (TVE) has been an integral part of national policy strategies for skills acquisition and means of spurring youths into the labour market in many societies, because of its impact on productivity and employment creation. Despite its contributions to alleviating youths' unemployment, the leaders of Nigeria have been giving lip service to this aspect of education that needed much attention. This is one of the reasons for the nation's mass youth unemployment.

**Entrepreneurship training:** It has been widely acknowledged that entrepreneurship training in both formal and informal education seeks to provide knowledge, skill, motivation, and the right attitude for the entrepreneur and encourage him or her to succeed in a variety of entrepreneurship ventures via mentorship, apprenticeship, vocational and technical education. Ugwuogo, (2013), Mbaezue and Agu (2013). There

are many approaches to the definitions of entrepreneur and entrepreneurship just as there are many researchers and scholars, but at the end there is an accord that an entrepreneur is a person who instead of working as an employee for another person, starts and runs a small business or enterprise of his or her own and assumes all the risks and takes all the rewards concerning the business. It can be seen as a one-man business, E-learning and teacher Education (2016), and Investopedia (2016). On the other hand, entrepreneurship has been noted to mean that the entrepreneur must have a good business mindset, be capable of managing human and material resources, setting of realizable objectives, seeking, identifying and making use of investment opportunities, must have innovative mind, must be prepared to take risks. He or she must have time for and patience with his business. Uzoagulu (2013), Ezedum, (2013).

**Technical Education:** Commenting on technical education, Okorie (2001), Osuala (2000) in Chukwuanukwu (2013) contend that technical education is a planned program of courses and learning experiences that begin with exploration of career options, supports basic academic and life skills, and enables achievement of high academic standards, leadership, preparation for industry-defined work, and advanced as well as continuing education. Technical education covers both formal and informal settings and is the training of craftsmen, artisans, technicians, and by extension technologists/engineers for work in academic institutions, industry, construction, transportation, communications, agriculture, and forestry, visual arts, marketing, sports and health. Throughout the period of industrial revolution, the preparation of skilled workers for the national economy is carried out within the system of technical-vocational education.

According to Brickman (2008) technical education is instruction in a skill or procedure, usually of a mechanical type, and at a level between that of the professional scientist or engineer and that of a skilled craftsperson. Technicians support scientists and engineers by designing, developing, producing, and maintaining machines and materials. The work of a technician according to Brickman's assertion is more limited in scope than that of a scientist or engineer and is commonly considered practical rather than theoretical in its orientation. Bogomolov and Parkhomenko (1979) and the National Policy on Education (2000) are in agreement that technical education is the academic and vocational

preparation of students for jobs involving applied science and modern technology. It emphasizes the understanding and practical application of basic principles of science and technical innovations with the attainment of proficiency in manual skills that is properly the concern of technical education. The cardinal objective of technical education is the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competences (mental and physical as equipment for the individual to live and contribute to the development of the society.

**Vocational Education:** This is a training that prepares learners for careers that are based on manual or practical activities, traditionally non-academic and totally related to a specific trade, occupation or vocation. In other words, it is an education designed to develop occupational skills. Vocational and technical education give individuals the skills to live, learn and work as a productive citizen in a global society. Chukwuanukwu (2013), NPE (2000) and Okorie (2001)

**Youth:** Universal institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) made a convergence of individuals under the age group of 15-24 as youths. In trying to bring out the significance of what characterizes the Youth, Curtain (2001) defined *youth as an economic and social concept referring to a separate stage in the lifecycle between childhood & adulthood*. In Nigeria, the definition of youth is based on the categorization of youth commonly by chronological age, ranging from different purposes such as marriage, criminal responsibility, voting right, consent to medical treatment, and military service to mention a few.

**Unemployment:** Definition of unemployment varies from country to country and among international organizations. According to World Bank (2013) unemployment is defined as the total share of the labour force that is without work but is available for work and is actively seeking for employment. In the same vain, NBS (2014) viewed unemployment as the number of persons aged 15 – 74, who fulfill the following three conditions;

- (1) Did not have any work during the reference week;
- (2) Had been actively seeking a job during the last four weeks or who found a job to start within a specified period of, at most three months;
- (3) Was able to start work in the next two weeks.

However, according to the two definitions, only those persons not at work for more than a specified minimum of time and who are able and are willing to work, and also actively seeking for work, are generally considered as unemployed. Therefore, unemployment is not applied to everyone who is not employed but only those of legal working age and others who are out of job and seeking for work. ILO (2014) defines unemployed people as “those who are currently not working but are willing and able to work for the current wage rate and have been actively searching for work”. Thus, unemployment occurs when people are without work and actively seeking for job.

### **Depressed economy**

In explaining economic depression, Kimberly, (2016), Wikipedia (2012) and Elumelu (2008) observed that an economic depression is a severe, unusual and extreme form of recession that lasts several years, resulting to a distortion in the flow of financial resources in the stream of financial system, flow of capital and investment badly affected, retarded economic activities of the economy, decreased demand for goods and services and therefore causing general economic difficulties in an economy. Jhingan, (2006) and Charles, (2009) agree in principle that economic depression could be likened to economic ‘go slow’ just like traffic jams which grind vehicular movements to a halt with attendant man hour losses, physical and emotional stress, etc; there is a collapse of confidence and sudden demands for liquidity as it sets off a wave of fright that culminates in a general run on financial institutions that will eventually bring an economy to a stop. An economy creeps into depression when there is a general decline in economic activities.

### **Features and consequences of depression in an economy**

Depression is characterized by mass unemployment; general fall in prices, profit, wages, and loan; factories closedown; and construction of all types of capital goods, buildings, etc, comes to a standstill. Summarily, economic activities of a depressed economy decline. The general decline in the economic activities leads to a fall in bank deposits. (The current situation in Nigeria is an exception to this in that prices rise continuously). The seeds of depression are contained in the boom in the form of strains in the economic structure which act as brakes to the expansionary path. They are: (i) scarcities of labour, raw materials, etc, leading to rise in the costs relative to prices; (ii) rise in the rate of

interest due to scarcity of capital, and (iii) failure of consumption to rise due to rising prices.

In corroborating the above observations, Eno-Abasi (2016) noted that in a depressed economy like Nigeria there is paucity of funds that results in whittling down the chances of meeting standard requirements for quality tertiary education. This development, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBBU), Lapai, Prof. Ibrahim Adamu Kolo, in Eno-Abasi (ibid) say continually compounds the smooth running of these institutions and negatively affects quality of learning and teaching. While commenting on depression, Shmoop-Premium (2016) noted that in a depressed economy, the GNP falls, there is massive job loss and billions of wealth vanishes into thin air.

### **Causes of economic depression**

Economic depression can arise either by monetary and non-monetary causes. Non-monetary factors like strikes, floods, earthquakes, droughts, wars, insurgency, etc, may at best cause a partial depression, but not a general depression. Monetary cause include stringent contractionary monetary policy e.g., high interest rate, increased government taxes etc, without corresponding expansionary monetary policy e.g., government expenditures, investment, including corruption of the type of diversion, conversion, misappropriation and embezzlement of public funds, non-diversification of economic activities, over population etc,

### **Challenges of technical and vocational education in a depressed economy.**

It should be noted that Uwaifo (2013) and Inyiagu (2014) observed that the challenges of vocational and technical education in Nigeria include underfunding by the government, neglect, lack of adequate facilities resulting from governments' inflation and high cost of TVET materials and equipment, disinterest, brain drain due to poor remunerations and welfare for lecturers in vocational and technical tertiary institutions who as a result move to the Universities for better welfare packages, lack of skilled and knowledgeable staff in position to teach, constant change in curriculum, constant change in educational policies, constant change in government, corruption of the type that funds meant for vocational and



technical education are often diverted, misappropriated or embezzled by the V.I.Ps (Vagabond in power)

### **Causes of unemployment in Nigeria**

The major cause of unemployment is lack of productive and marketable skills due to recession. This is because many of the Nigerian school leavers are not adequately equipped with skills to fit into the production sector of the economy. Yahaya and Aliyu (2014) observed that technical education/skills as a strategic empowerment and skill acquisition are not functional in the country. However, study has shown that technical education or vocational training has a higher probability of preparing youths for the skills and vocation that make them potential for the labour market and self-employment. This is as a result of the nature of educational system introduced to us by the colonial masters, which was non-functional. The educational system and the growth of our economy compared with that which is dysfunctional. Our educational system supports institutionalized and systematic unemployment.

Youth unemployment appears to be an urban phenomenon as compared to rural unemployment in Nigeria because in the rural communities, the preoccupation is farming/agricultural activities. Ogboru (2004) reporting on the cause of unemployment stated that agriculture is the tap root of an economy. He warned that any attempt to give agricultural activities a secondary attention in the economy of any nation would sooner or later create unemployment situation. Investigation into Nigeria sources of revenue in the 1960s and early 1970s showed that agricultural products were the chief source of income to the country. But with the neglect of agriculture due to oil boom, the economy later failed, and this has resulted in unemployment.

Ogboru (2004) noted that the high degree of unemployment in the developing countries were due to the neglect of indigenous technology and inadequate patronage received by local industries from the consumers and their government as well as the rate of profit reinvestment in the foreign owned industries in the country. He observed that in any economic system where indigenous technology and local industries were not encouraged and patronized, there tend to be a decrease in the production capacity and, an increase in



the dumping of the country's wealth in foreign countries in the name of purchasing foreign goods.

The picture portrayed by Ogboru above was actually what happened in Nigeria, where especially during the oil boom period, other sectors of the Nigerian economy were abandoned, and that has contributed to the unemployment situation in the country, and the greatest unemployment-causing factor in Nigeria has been attributed to the ineptitude, corruption, fraud and general failure of leadership in the country.

### **Effects of unemployment in Nigeria**

Unemployment is undesirable, bringing economic, social and political vices to the society. It has numerous consequences to the society it visits. The high wave of crime, robbery and kidnapping by youths has been traced to unemployment. Princewill, and Osi (2002) observed that since 1999, Nigeria has experienced unprecedented rise in crime wave, armed robbery, political assassinations, religious riots, inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic clashes and communal clashes. All were due to the increasing unemployment rate. Recently, researchers have noticed an unprecedented increase in prostitution among young girls. The result of investigations carried out in our brothels and hostels in some urban areas in Nigeria among prostitutes noted that prostitutes confessed resorting to the fate because of the scourge of unemployment.

Arogundade (2012), observed that research on the consequences of unemployment revealed that autonomous consumption is inevitable, thus making some feeble minded ones indulge in robbery. Besides, examination malpractices are perpetrated by some jobless school leavers who must make ends, meet. These teach the younger ones negative options available for survival. Mario (2013) stated that unemployment and price increase of food and the unceasing onslaught of the unemployed and their dependents have led to increased malnutrition and its associated diseases in the third world. Sanus (1997) and Yousaf (2012) both agreed that as far as unemployment affects the individual, the most social effect is loss of income, and that unemployment is in the first place a source of poverty. This affects the personality of the unemployed in that it is possible for an inferiority complex to set in.

In underpinning the above points, Nicholas (2000) noted that the social consequences of unemployment for those who are out of work include higher incidence of poverty, ill-health and death, demoralized and strained family relationship. For society as a whole, they include the failure to realize the social investment in human capital made through the education system, and a loss of tax revenue combined with increased out-going in unemployment benefits that threaten the finances of other parts of the welfare of the state. Also, the evil effects of mass unemployment have cracked some families in the country. It has led to broken marriages of once happily married couples. As well, Uzochukwu (2013) supported this view when he stated that families have broken up and the future of their children bleak owing to unemployment. Okezie (2011) maintained that some unemployed people, and their families experience anxiety and despair, frustration and desperate unhappiness. He also stated that the psychological pressure of unemployment cause some people to suffer stress, depression and suicide.

Unemployment represents a waste of human labour. An increase in the size of the non-working population is a simultaneous increase in the burden of “liability” of the working population. An implication can be drawn from here that some difficulties do arise as to how to manage the meagre finance of the working class. Rodney (2013) noted that the unemployed eventually becomes psychologically wrecked. There are many more consequences of unemployment such as poor housing, poor clothing, lack of medical care, poor means of transportation and so on. These are the genesis of the technical knockout unemployment has for Nigeria should our leaders not live to their responsibilities.

### **Resolving unemployment through vocational and technical education**

Nigeria is currently facing the challenges of youth unemployment. Technical occupations are vital in a wide range of fields, and could be useful to youths on employment, but the youths lack technical skills and vocation that could offer them the needed job in the country. Technical and vocational education covers both formal and informal settings and is the training of craftsmen, artisans, technicians, and by extension technologists/engineers for work in academic institutions, industry, construction, transportation, communications, agriculture, and forestry. If more youths get equipped

with technical skills regardless of their first course of study, more venture capital would be provided, and social entrepreneurship be encouraged, spurring the youth towards innovations, job creation, wealth creation and self-reliance with a wide range of employment-value-chain which in-turn will mitigate the high rate of youth unemployment in Nigeria. Umoru and Okeke (2012).

According to Kalu (2014). Throughout the period of industrial revolution, the preparation of skilled workers for the national economy was carried out within the system of technical-vocational education. While technical and vocational education have continued to thrive in many societies, Nigeria has neglected this aspect of education. Consequently, the country lacks skilled technicians: bricklayers, carpenters, painters and auto mechanics; laboratory and pharmaceutical technicians, electrical/electronic technicians and skilled vocational nurses, etc.

The neglect of vocational and technical education is socially and economically injurious to the economy because it is robbing the nation the contributions that the graduates would have made on national development through skill acquisition, self-employment and job creation. Toiling all day in the field with knives, hoes, and shovels would not feed the nation's over 140 million people. Mechanized farming requires technical skills that could be obtained in technical and vocational schools. Although technical and vocational education seem deficient in citizenship or leadership training, it provides students with 'life skills' to become productive entrepreneurs as it encourages creative and innovative ideas, enlarges the economic ideas, and increases job opportunities. Most of the so-called "expatriate engineers" who are being paid millions of dollars to build Nigerian roads and bridges are graduates of technical and vocational colleges, yet Nigerian leaders do not take technical and vocational institutions seriously. Umunadi (2010).

Nigeria's current preoccupation with university education reduces economic opportunities of those who are more oriented toward work than academics. Not everyone needs a university education. Awarding licenses to greedy organizations and individuals to establish private universities that are not even as equipped as some of the technical and vocational schools in the United States and other advanced nations cannot develop the

society economically because the nation's tertiary institutions produced many of the graduates who lack employable skills, which can only be acquired through technical and vocational colleges. It is no longer news that the nation's youth unemployment rate has been shooting up the sky. The federal government recently acknowledged that about 80 per cent of Nigeria's youths are unemployed and 10 per cent underemployed.

However, the more aspect of the youth unemployment in the country is the poor quality of Nigerian graduates and this is a worrisome scenario. This is not being unemployable or poor quality of graduate. It is that the system could not provide the student before graduation the needed skills and vocational training for self-reliance, and the economy has no capacity of absorbing the graduates the country produces annually. Others have urged that youth should be entrepreneurially inclined and be good citizens. But it is not enough to ask the youths to become entrepreneurs and reject social vices or to be patriotic without providing them with skills and financial resources for self-employment. Empowering the people with technical skills would enhance their productivity and national development. Nigeria's poverty alleviation programs have been ineffective because of lack of skills training facilities and social services. Giving money to the poor who has no skill and cannot manage their own lives to set up small business is like pouring water into a bucket with several holes.

It cannot be overemphasized that technical education is an engine for job creation and economic growth. No nation can fight a war without an army. In the same vain, Nigeria cannot reduce unemployment in the economy without well-equipped technical and vocational institutions; in fact, it is the missing link in Nigeria's development policy (Dike, 2005). Because of poor training and ineffective and disfunctional technical institutions, Nigerian economy suffers low marginal productivity of labour. While theoretically the progress of any society lies in the productivity of its citizens, higher productivity gives a nation advantage of economies of scale and lowers the costs of production and prices of goods and services. Nigeria should begin now to take it very seriously, investing in technical education and skill training, as no nation can compete effectively in the emerging global market with poorly educated and unskilled workers. The leading factors of production in the emerging global economy are said to be technology, knowledge, creativity and innovation.

## Conclusion

Youth unemployment in Nigeria is connected to ineffective technical/vocational education and the development of entrepreneurship culture. A drastic shift in policy from the present incremental theoretical curriculum to scientific and technical subjects that promote student-centered learning must be adopted to resolve the scourge of unemployment in the country. It is argued that skill acquisition should be complemented by skills management which vocational/technical education provides. An effective public-private interface can robustly enrich the curricula and reduce the present unemployment due to mismatch between labour market demands and acquired skills. Technical and vocational teacher education is a necessity for teachers at all levels to be able to acquire and impart the necessary knowhow and governments as well as all stakeholders must honestly fund and provide the enabling environment for VTE.

## Recommendations

1. Government must take technical and vocational education seriously. Technical colleges and polytechnics should be reformed on practical techniques of imparting and preparing students for needed skills for labour market, by going back to the drawing board of techniques of the technical curriculum, so do combine with the high theoretical and administrative studies in the system. This can be done by setting up entrepreneurial, technical and vocational centres or workshops in the institutions, where the practicals and practices of technical skills can take place.
2. All stakeholders (Governments, NGOs, Parents etc) should ensure that infrastructural facilities are made available for practices in the various technical colleges and polytechnics so that students can be engaged in productive activities in various hand works e.g. ceramics facilities (ceramic cups, plates, jugs etc.) can be produced. Leather work centres and materials (leader bags, shoes, belt, upholstery etc.)
3. Government should ensure that graduates are made to undergo internship training in vocational centres, and should be mandated to form cooperatives, short and long-term soft credit be made available for successful participants.
4. *The vocational and technical education practitioners and experts should use their understanding of science, technology, and engineering to explore local craft and*

*impact technical skills on the youths to enhance job creation, wealth creation and self-employed to tackle the challenges of youth unemployment in Nigeria.*

5. Government should institute infrastructural facilities like energy and power policy to encourage the growth of technical education and practices in Nigeria.
6. Technology education must be given due attention by the government and the teachers in secondary schools. Practical aspect of practical oriented course should be taught with relevant tools and equipment workshops to prepare the students skills for self-reliant and job creation.
7. Governments should pay serious attention to improving the welfare of lecturers in the technical colleges and tertiary institutions to reduce the brain drain syndrome
8. Governments should adopt the Asian tigers' policies against corruption for the fight against it to be meaningful.

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