

# Repositioning Tertiary Education in Nigeria in Tackling Rising Graduate Unemployment

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## Abstract

The paper focuses on the need for re-positioning tertiary education in Nigeria as a tool for dealing with the increasing cases of graduate unemployment in the country. Data for the paper was collected from secondary sources and as a result, qualitative technique of data analysis was employed. Emphasis was laid on the concept of tertiary education as well as the concept of graduate unemployment. Reasons for high level of graduate unemployment in Nigeria, implication of high level of graduate unemployment, strategies to improve tertiary education for adequate graduate employment were also discussed. It was therefore pointed out that although graduate unemployment has negative effects on the society, it can however be controlled. It was therefore recommended that financial assistance should be provided for graduates of tertiary institutions and vocational and technical education should also be encouraged at this level.

## Keywords

Graduate, Education, Unemployment, Planning, Technical

## I. Introduction

Education all over the world has been identified as one of the key instrument needed to achieve growth and development in the society. However, despite the enormous expenditure incurred on education by both individuals and the government, little returns have been derived from such investment. There is very little or nothing to show for the expenditure incurred on education in the country.

Each year, there is a continuous establishment of higher institutions of different categories in the country. In the same vein, more graduates are being produced in these higher institutions. However, there is little or no effort by individuals and the government to absorb the graduates produced from these various academic institutions. The effect of this is that there is a high supply of labour force with very little demand from the various sectors of the economy. This has resulted in the low pricing of labour in the country and similarly contributed to the increasing level of unemployment in the country.

Labour as a variable factor of production is of utmost importance in the growth and development of Nigeria. "Nigeria has the potential for rapid economic growth and development given her rich human and material resources" [1]. However, this important resource has so far being underutilized. This is largely due to the unwholesome planning exercise carried out by educational planners and managers on the demand and supply of labour in the various sectors of the economy. This has so far made the abundant labour resources in the country to be more of a disadvantage rather than a blessing.

## II. Concept of Tertiary Education

Tertiary education is a concept that is usually used to identify the apex level of education in any country. Usually, the term is used to identify that group of education that awards the highest certification in any country. Tertiary education is the third level of education which a student acquires after completing high

school [7]. It therefore covers all the other level of education that issues a recognized certificate after the secondary school level of education. Tertiary education is "the education given after secondary education in universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics including those institutions offering corresponding courses" [4]. The term 'tertiary education' is therefore used interchangeably with term 'higher education'. It is used to describe all form of post-secondary education offered within the country.

The goals of tertiary education shall be to:

1. Contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training;
2. Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and the society;
3. Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
4. Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
5. Promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
6. Forge and cement national unity; and
7. Promote national and international understanding and interaction" [4].

## III. Concept of Graduate Unemployment

It is the responsibility of the government and private individuals that all citizens of the country should be employed. All things being equal, every economy should operate at full employment [5]. This means that every country has the capacity to leverage one or more resources to create room for the employment of all citizens that are of employment age.

Employment in this context is a situation in which a person, who is willing, able and qualified to work, gets a job to do in any sector of the economy. Similarly, employment is described as a contract between an employer and an employee [9]. It is a situation in which service is rendered in exchange for monetary or non-monetary benefit. However, in a case where such opportunities are not available, this can be regarded as a case of unemployment. Unemployment is described as a condition in which people that are active and seeking for work to do fail to find such job opportunities [10]. Unemployment is also described as conditions in which people that are members of the labour force and are sure of their ability to work but find no work to do [3]. The rising case of unemployment affects all sections of the national economy; male, female, graduates and post-graduates alike.

Graduate unemployment of the other hand is a term that is used to define the inability of a graduate to find a job. On the other hand, graduate unemployment is an unemployment situation among those with an academic degree [11]. Graduate unemployment can therefore be said to be a condition in which graduates fail to find a job that matches their academic experience, level of education or skill level.

#### **IV. Reasons for High Graduate Unemployment”**

Despite the effort of the government and other private individuals in the country, the level of graduate unemployment in the country has continued to rise. Number of unemployed graduates in the country continues to increase as more graduates are produced from the different tertiary institutions within the country. Some of the reasons why graduate unemployment in the country has remained on the increase includes but is not limited to the following:

##### **A. Individual Choices**

The choice of job is a decision that most people make by themselves. Most of the graduates from the various higher institutions in the country are usually in search of white and blue collar jobs which are rarely available. As a result of this desire, most graduates have remained unemployed due to their determination or desire of securing a well paid job at all cost. In the same vein, there are other personal reasons which determines which type of job an individual desires to undertake and since such jobs are unavailable at the moment, this has kept some graduates unemployed for some time. Some of these individual reasons includes: peer influence, marital engagements, economic status etc.

##### **B. Lack of Technical Skills**

Aside getting a job, another way of reducing the cases of unemployment in the country is to ensure that students are equipped with vocational and technical skills. Various business experts have suggested that having a skill in addition to paid employment is a way of overcoming poverty. Aside addressing the issue of poverty, technical or vocational skills also helps to overcome the cases of unemployment. However, due to the inability of most graduates to acquire any productive skills with which they can earn a living, some of these graduates have remained unemployed until when job opportunities are made open in any sector of the economy.

##### **C. Wrong Labour Placement**

Education can only be meaningful when an individual is able to find a place to exhibit the skills and knowledge acquired in the school system. However, most of the students graduated from our tertiary institutions have been forced to practice professions that they did not study while in school. Tribalism, nepotism and god-fatherism have led to graduates occupying work positions that are at variance with their course of study. Politics in the country is no more for political science students, banking and insurance jobs is now reserved for agricultural scientists while pharmacists and medical students are forced to pass time in the classroom. All of these abnormalities have contributed in so many ways in increasing the cases of graduate unemployment in the various sectors of the economy.

##### **D. Inappropriate Industrial Laws**

The labour laws in the country are hardly enforced in most sectors of the country. Similarly, labour laws which are made to protect the right of employees are sometimes undermined. Job seekers in the country in the country have therefore remained unemployed because the labour laws in the country do not guarantee their job satisfaction. The issue of job security is hardly upheld in most organizations and in some cases labour agreements are easily defaulted. This has resulted in so many graduates remaining unemployed rather than be engaged in forced labour.

##### **E. Economic Depression**

The level and nature of economic recession also contributes to

the high cases of graduate unemployment in the country. When the productive sectors of the economy find it difficult to pay wages and manage other production cost, this usually leads to the application of cost reduction strategies such as firing of employees. In some cases, there is usually a halt in the level of employment opportunities. This was the situation during the recent global economic meltdown. Such economic downturn usually increases the amount of unemployed graduates in the country.

Other factors that contribute to a high level of unemployment among graduates in the country include the following:

1. Health condition
2. Work duration
3. Wages and salaries
4. Population explosion
5. Corruption

#### **V. How Does Tertiary Education Contribute to High Level of Graduate Unemployment ?**

The tertiary level of education is targeted towards equipping individuals to contribute to the development of the entire nation. The skills and knowledge acquired from any of the tertiary institutions in the country should be able to build individuals who would make the country to be better-off than worse-off. However, despite the enormous objectives which the tertiary level of education is expected to achieve, little progress has been made so far. Some of the problems of tertiary institutions in the country which has resulted to a high level of graduate unemployment in the country are:

##### **A. Admission Procedures**

Most of the tertiary institutions in the country have failed at one point or the other to apply accurate principles in the admission of students. Cut-off marks, choice of courses and O'level requirements for most academic programmes have not been duly followed. The implication of this is that most of the students in tertiary institutions within the country have been compelled to study courses that are at variance with their interest. This has resulted into low level of productivity and innovation. Tertiary institutions within the country have failed to admit students based on their interest and on merit. Students who would have contributed immensely towards the development of the country are found studying programmes in which they do not have the requisite requirements. This is a case of fixing square pegs into round holes and this has contributed into a high number of unemployed graduates who are taking time to identify where exactly they can fit in among the various sectors of the economy.

##### **B. Inadequate Infrastructures**

The absence of quality infrastructures in most of the tertiary institutions in the country is another way in which tertiary institutions in the country have contributed into the high level of graduate unemployment in the country. Due to lack of learning and research infrastructures such as: classrooms, laboratories, workshops, ICT centers, libraries etc, students have found it difficult to acquire the quality knowledge needed for them to contribute to their immediate environment. Most of the programmes which students should have learnt through practical have been learnt theoretically. Similarly, due to inadequate classrooms, some students have found it difficult to attend classes and the libraries which are ill-equipped have also contributed to poor research work among students. The tertiary institutions in the country ought to provide a blue-print of what students will face in real life

experience. However, when the needed facilities and equipment are in short supply, student graduates find it difficult to adapt and contribute effectively towards the growth and development of the society.

### **C. Inadequate Guidance and Counseling Service**

Usually, most of the tertiary institutions in the country ought to have guidance and counseling units. This unit is supposed to provide quality advice for students on social, economic, political and career issues. However, majority of the higher institutions in the country do not have provision for this service. Students who have problems with their course of study or need career advices about their future have been left at the mercy of their friends. Such unprofessional advices have led students into graduating in courses that is not actually their choice. Most of the students in our tertiary institutions undergoing one programme or the other are not sure if those courses are actually what they want to study as a profession. Such students therefore require professional advice so as to graduate in programmes where they can make meaningful contribution to the advancement of the society.

### **D. Inadequate Educational Planning**

The planning of education in any country should usually take into consideration the demand for labour in the various sectors of the economy. The approach of educational planning should correlate with manpower requirement in the sectors of the economy as is being applied in India [8]. This will help to reduce the number of excess labour produced from the educational sector. The demand for labour from the industries should be assessed and put into consideration when admitting students and before graduation into the workforce.

## **VI. Implications of Graduate Unemployment**

The reason why most individuals in the society decide to pursue formal education is to secure opportunity to be gainfully employed in any sector of the economy. Since education serves as one of the conditions which must be satisfied for job opportunities, most individuals in the society have patiently endured all the cost; financial and non-financial needed to graduate successfully from any of the tertiary institutions in the country. However, in a situation where such individuals fulfill all the conditions required to secure employment in the society and do not find such opportunities, the effect is felt both among individuals and the entire society as a whole. Some of the implications of a rising level of graduate unemployment are:

### **A. Slow Pace of Economic Development**

Labour in any society whether skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled is expected to contribute in one way or the other towards the growth and development of the society. However, in a situation where there are no available jobs for these people, the effect is that the economy will experience a slower level of economic growth and development. Graduates from tertiary institutions are supposed to contribute to the establishment and management of various sectors of the economy such as agriculture, health, politics, finance etc. Most of the sectors of the economy have continuously agitated for an increased manpower. The inadequacy of the required workforce has contributed to the slow pace of development in the country.

### **B. Increase in the Level of Social Vices**

‘An idle mind they say is the devils workshop’. The inability of most graduates to secure employment after graduation has led

them into different forms of anti-social activities. Graduates from different schools have been led into different social vices such as armed robbery, prostitution, political thugs, vandalism etc. the level of insecurity in the country has also increased because most of the graduates in the society have failed to find a place where they can exercise their mental and physical expertise. This situation has gradually escalated the level of anti-social activities in the country. in the same vein, some established politicians and businessmen have taken advantage of graduate unemployment in the country to lure anxious youths into criminal activities such as oil theft, kidnapping and murder. This is largely due to the inability of these graduates to find something worthwhile to do after graduation.

### **C. Brain Drain**

“Brain Drain can be described as the migration of educated and skilled labour from poorer to richer countries” [3]. When the available labour force in a country find no place to work within the country, they have no alternative than to seek for employment in other countries. Most of the graduates from Nigerian tertiary institutions are today working and contributing greatly to the economies of other countries of the world. The unavailability of employment opportunities in the country has contributed to the flight of quality manpower from the country to other countries of the world. Some of the manpower’s which are lost to other countries of the world are today notable contributors to their host countries. When there are insufficient opportunities in a country, it contributes to a high level of migration of quality manpower from one country to another.

### **D. Frustration and Loss of Self-Esteem**

The cost of acquiring education in a developing country like Nigeria is usually very high. For example, the fees charged by private universities in the country are usually expensive [6]. Similarly, cost of public higher institutions in the country is also higher than anticipated. Based on these financial and non-financial cost incurred by students to acquire formal education, most students are easily frustrated in a situation where they graduate and find it difficult to secure employment in the country. Unemployment also contributes to a low self-esteem among most people. When such a situation is not properly managed, it sometimes results into various kind of mental and physical illness.

The implications of graduate unemployment are usually inestimable. This is because the various educational stakeholder are affected in one way or the other when the number of unemployed graduates in the country keeps increasing; parents, teachers, students, educational institutions, private sectors and government alike.

## **VII. Strategies for Increasing Employment Opportunities**

### **A. Public Sector Expansion**

Among the strategies for creating employment opportunities in the country is to expend the capacity of the various sectors of the economy. The various institutions under the watch of the government should be re-organized in order to create more job opportunities for graduates. For example, the agricultural sector should be made as lucrative as possible so as to encourage graduates to pick up job opportunities in this area. The agricultural sector if well organized is able to accommodate most of the graduates who are presently unemployed. Other sectors which can generate

employment opportunities for graduates are in the country are: tourism, ICT, mining etc.

### **B. Encouraging Entrepreneurship**

As a way of creating employment in the country, government and various individuals in the country need to think innovatively about how to make individuals employers of labour and not job seekers. As a capitalist economy, Nigerians need to think of products and services which can generate employment for other members of the society. Students at various levels of education should be equipped with the skills and resources to go into entrepreneurship. This will make students to become competent to create jobs rather than look for jobs. The school system should be repositioned in order to provide students at all levels to learn one form of vocation or the other which they can develop as a profession or vocation. This will help to reduce the search for white and blue collar jobs upon graduation.

### **C. Private Sector Participation**

The private sector also has a role to play in reducing the high level of unemployed graduates in the country. However, the government also needs to create an enabling environment for the private sector through her plans and policies. Part of the social corporate responsibility of the private sector is to create jobs especially for their host communities. Most private institutions have not been very effective in this area. Private sectors in the country should make it a responsibility to create jobs for the teeming population. This in return will also enhance the image and profit merging of such organization.

### **D. International Job Opportunities**

Aside generating employment within the country, jobs can also be generated in the international market. The various stakeholders should help create a stable atmosphere for graduates to secure employment opportunities from other countries of the world. On daily basis, diverse job opportunities are made available for unemployed graduates; this range from online businesses to country representatives of different Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). However, when the appropriate mechanisms are not in place to bring such opportunities to the notice of the various unemployed youths in the country, such opportunities usually erode them to the advantage of other interested countries. It is therefore the responsibility of the government and various ministries and agencies to bring to the notice of unemployed graduates in the country information about job opportunities that are available from other countries of the world.

### **VIII. Strategies to Improve Tertiary Education for Adequate Graduate Employment**

Education all over the world has been viewed as the major instrument for the placement of individuals into the various sectors of the economy. As such, the tertiary education sector needs to be improved in order to ensure a high level of graduate employment in the country. Some of the strategies through tertiary institutions can be improved to contribute to adequate graduate employability in the country are:

- A. Adequate infrastructures should be provided in the various higher institutions in the country in order to help students learn meaningfully. This will help to reduce the production of unemployable graduates into the various sectors of the economy. Students should be given the opportunity to learn in a friendly environment such that they can put their acquired

knowledge to work in the wider society.

- B. Merit should be considered when admitting students. Students should also be admitted based on merits. Students that qualify for various courses should be given the opportunity to study such programmes so that they can contribute to national development.
- C. Internship, industrial training and practical programmes should be adequately organized for students. Students should be given the opportunity to acquire firsthand knowledge from already established organizations. This will help students to fit in properly into any sector of the economy where they find themselves.
- D. General study courses should be made compulsory for all students. This course should be modified so as to provide preliminary knowledge for students. Such course will provide background knowledge for students so that they can function properly in any sector of the economy where they are gainfully employed.
- E. Technical, vocational or entrepreneurial education should be made a core programme in the various higher institutions in the country. Students should be equipped from their undergraduate levels on different skills which they can use for self-employment upon graduation.

### **IX. Ways to Empower Graduates for Employment**

Each year, more and more graduates are produced from the various tertiary institutions operating within the country. It is therefore necessary that this various graduates are given the opportunity to secure employment upon graduation. The various stakeholders in the country therefore need to provide adequate opportunities for graduates to secure jobs of their choice after graduation. This can be done through the following ways:

- A. Financial assistance should be provided to graduates upon graduation by the various financial institutions in the country. This will help them to be well equipped to set up self employment in the event of short supply of jobs.
- B. Partnership businesses should be encouraged among unemployed graduates. Since resources for production are always in short supply, graduates can come together and pull resources together which will help them established a partnership business. This will help provide employment for all the partners involved.
- C. The private sectors in the country should be obliged to provide training services for unemployed graduates. The unemployed graduates in the country can be provided opportunity to gain work experience from the various private sectors in the country. This will help provide the needed requirement for employment in order sectors of the economy. It will also assist graduates to gain idea on how to establish and run their own private businesses.
- D. Government can also help provided scholarship for indigent students to acquire more professional training both within and outside the country. Such scholarship will equip students with the knowledge with which they can become employers of labour.

### **X. Conclusion**

The essence of education is to make an individual a productive and acceptable member of the society. Education over the years has been used as a yardstick for placing an individual into the various sectors of the economy. However, there is need to ensure a proper synergy between education and economic opportunities.

Tertiary education has been described as a tool for manpower development in the various sectors of the economy. As such, education in the country needs to be re-positioned so as to achieve the national objectives of education. In the same vein, the provision of tertiary education in the country should be closely monitored so as to curtail the case of excess labour supply in various sectors of the economy.

## XI. Recommendations

Based on the literatures reviewed, the following recommendations are made:

- A. Educational Planners at all level should ensure to carry out proper planning of tertiary education at all levels. The supply of manpower from the various levels of education should be done based on the demand from the various sectors of the economy. This will help to address the case of underutilization, over-utilization and wastage of quality manpower produced from the education sector.
- B. Job opportunities from the various sectors of the economy should be centralized in a common data base. Graduates should be able to get accurate and transparent access to job opportunities within the country. This will help to reduce the case unemployment in the midst of available job opportunities.
- C. Vocational and technical education should also be encouraged and made compulsory at all levels of education. This is to enable graduates acquire entrepreneurial skills which will make them employers of labour rather than job seekers.
- D. Adequate financial assistance should be made available for unemployed graduates. Such funding arrangement will provide graduates with access to funds with which they can establish their own personal businesses.

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