

Ameliorating the Problem of Unemployment among Graduates through Relevant, Functional and Sustainable University Education in Nigeria

Festus Oluwole Afolabi

Department of Educational Administration and Planning
Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Nigeria
ZIP /Postal code: 351001
E-mail: afolab52@yahoo.com

Musibau Adeoye Yusuf

(Corresponding Author)

Department of Educational Administration and Planning
Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Nigeria
ZIP /Postal code: 351001
E- mail: siyanmade@gmail.com

Ezekiel Kayode Idowu

Department of Curriculum Studies and Instructions
College of Education, Ikere Ekiti, Nigeria
E- mail: idowuezekielkayode@gmail.com

(Received: 5-2-14 / Accepted: 10-4-14)

Abstract

Of all the forms of tertiary education in Nigeria, the demand for University education has been on increase especially in the last two decades. In response to the social demand for University education in Nigeria, the Federal and State Government as well as Private individuals, religious and other organisations have established more Universities in the country. Ironically, the unprecedented increase in the number of Federal, State and private Universities in Nigeria has further led to sharp increase in the number of university graduates released yearly into the labour market. Thus, the problem of graduate unemployment is becoming more ruinous and alarming in the nation. If University education is made more relevant, functional and sustainable through effective funding, adequate recruitment of highly motivated personnel, provision of infra-structural facilities and modern teaching equipment and proper development of moral values of students, problem of graduate unemployment would be greatly reduced. Moreover the high level manpower developed through University education in Nigeria would undoubtedly utilise the acquired knowledge, skills and attitudinal value to attain and sustain economic efficiency, political consciousness, social reconstruction, cultural change and scientific and technological advancement. All these would reduce problem of graduate unemployment and enhance national development.

Keywords: Unemployment, Graduates, University Education, Tertiary Education, Functional University Education.

Introduction

Of all the problems facing Nigeria in recent times which are being reported daily in some national newspapers and magazines, such as insecurity challenges, assassination of political opponents, feud over chieftaincy affairs, bunkering, wilful vandalisation of pipelines, inter-religious crisis, armed robbery, kidnapping, bribery and corruption, examination malpractice, cultism in educational institutions, incessant strike by workers over poor conditions of service and high rate of unemployment among Nigerian graduates, none is as virulent, persistent and agonizing as the problem of high rate of unemployment among Nigeria graduates. Nigeria, hitherto, remains a nation that is severely plagued by the problem of graduate unemployment. This problem has been so critical that continues to re-echo at various conferences organised by various Nigerian tertiary institutions, State and Federal Ministries of Education and other government parastatals. Also, the problem has become a regular feature of Federal, State and private Broadcasting Corporations. Moreover, the legislatures in the State and National Assemblies have been persistently deliberating on how to effectively tackle the problem of graduate unemployment in Nigeria.

Tertiary education is well embraced in Nigeria and of all the tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the demand for University education, particularly in the last two decades had been unprecedented. The Government and people of Nigeria perceive University education as an indispensable instrument for human capital development, with the sole aim of wiping out unemployment, political instability economic stagnation and other ills and vices that usually plague an under-developed nation. The development of University education, in Nigeria could be traced to 1948, when the first University in Nigeria, the University College, Ibadan was established. Since then, the rate of growth of Universities in Nigeria had been phenomenal. In 1962, four additional Universities were established in four towns in Nigeria. The number increased to thirteen in 1977, while eight additional Universities were established in 1983. Moreover, based on the recommendations of the Longe Commission (Longe Report, 1991); and the promulgation of Act No.9 of 1993, the Federal Government decided to lift ban on the establishment of private Universities in the country. This Act repealed the abolition and prohibition of the private Universities upon satisfying the laid down regulations and guidelines and getting government approval. Moreover, the legal support for the establishment of the private Universities in Nigeria was provided by the Act. In September, 1993, the Federal Regulatory Agency, the National Universities Commission started issuing application forms to prospective proprietors of the private Universities.

As clearly indicated in Table 1, as at January, 2012 out of 365 tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the number of Universities was 113 representing 31.0% other tertiary institutions include 74 (20.3%) Polytechnics; 80 (21.9%) Colleges of Education; 53 (14.5%) Monotechnics and Innovation Enterprise Institutions; 45 (12.3%).

Table 1: Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria as at January, 2012

	Forms of Institutions	Ownership	Number	Percentage (%)
(a)	Universities	Federal	35	
		State	35	
		Private	43	
		Total	113	31.0
(b)	Polytechnics	Federal	23	
		State	33	
		Private	18	
		Total	74	20.3

(c)	Colleges of Education	Federal	20	21.9
		State	43	
		Private	17	
		Total	80	
(d)	Monotechnics	Federal	27	14.5
		State	24	
		Private	2	
		Total	53	
(e)	Innovation Enterprise Institutions	Federal	-	12.3
		State	-	
		Private	45	
		Grand Total	365	

Source: Statistical Report on 2011 Admission and 2012 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination. (UTME) Applications. Abuja: Joint Admissions and Matriculations Board (JAMB)

There are various factors responsible for the high demand for University education in Nigeria. One of these is the keen awareness of the Government and concerned individuals in Nigeria, of the lofty role of university education in the socio-economic development of the nation. According to Ajayi and Afolabi (2009), "University education prepares one for the challenges of responsible adulthood and existential relevance in the society, as it equips the individual with the necessary skills and attitudinal orientation needed to forge ahead in one's chosen career in life as well as contributing meaningfully to the development of the nation." Another reason for high demand for University education in Nigeria is the rapid expansion in primary and secondary education witnessed in Nigeria, since the attainment of political independence in the country. Also, is the fact that University education is widely perceived in Nigeria, as a form of education that guarantees the individual's meal ticket and enhances his socio-economic status.

Apart from the astronomical increase in the number of Universities in Nigeria, since the last decade, eligible students, applications for admission into the Nigerian Universities were far above other level of tertiary education in Nigeria, as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Applications into the Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education between 2001 and 2009

Year	Application into the Universities (UME only)	Percentage (%)	Application into Monotechnics, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education	Percentage (%)
2001	893,259	82.02	195,788	17.98
2002	1,028,988	82.68	215,541	17.32
2003	1,172,313	82.10	255,659	17.90
2004	1,043,361	81.02	244,463	18.98
2005	962,133	85.20	167,089	14.80
2006	1,030,670	86.32	163,331	13.68
2007	893,250	84.65	162,031	15.35
2008	1,028,988	77.00	307,215	23.00
2009	1,185,574	77.60	342,499	22.40

Source: Dibu Ojerinde (2011) Contemporary Educational issues in Nigeria. India: Melrose Books and Publishing Ltd., P.328.

As clearly indicated in Table 2, in 2007 the students' applications for admission into Nigerian Universities were 893,250 representing 84.65%; while 162,031 applications representing 15.35% were received for the entire Polytechnics, Monotechnics and Colleges of Education in Nigeria. In 2008, 1,028,989 (77.00%) for Universities; and 307,215 (23.00%) for other Nigerian tertiary institutions; in 2009, 1,185,574 (77.60%) applications were received for the Universities and 342,499 (22.40%) for other tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

There is a large turnout of graduates from Nigerian Universities every year who join the astronomical number of unemployed youths in the labour market. As succinctly remarked by Aregbesola (2008), "the rate of unemployment in Nigeria is rapidly increasing especially with the disappearance of jobs in the public service and the churning out of an estimated 120,000 graduates annually by Nigerian Universities and Polytechnics." Balogun (2010) also asserts that "Nigeria has one of the highest unemployment figures in the world and that Nigerian youths are the hardest hit by the menace of unemployment." It is, however, disheartening that some of these frustrated unemployed graduates take solace in armed robbery, hostage taking, drug abuse, bunkering, kidnapping, prostitution, cultism and other forms of criminality which pose a great challenge to economic growth and development in the nation.

There is no doubt that an efficient and effective University education which places high premium on skill acquisition for self-reliance is a must for solving of the problem of graduate unemployment in Nigeria. According to Ray (1998) "No nation can achieve the employment goals without emphasis on entrepreneurship development." Ironically, the skills that many graduate, who are job seekers possess, do not match the needs and demands of employers in Nigeria. Most Nigerian Universities today are yet to tailor their academic programmes, to satisfy the demand of the work force. Consequently, their products were largely ill-prepared for the demand of the labour market and graduate unemployment behemes unabated. As remarked by Aregbesola (2008), "Most companies have to train fresh University and Polytechnic graduates in order to acquire the skills necessary to perform their role." Also, Adepoju (2012) affirmed that "Nigeria's education system, with tits literal bros, does not just over supply the labour market with graduates and school leaves, but also does not produce the type of skills demanded in formal employment.

It is no superfluous to remark that most programmes in Nigerian Universities are not practical oriented and the graduates could not acquire the relevant skills needed for self-reliance. According to Sharmo (2008), "the scheme of a curriculum must take account of the adaptation of studies to the needs of the existing community life; it must select with the intention of improving the life we live in common so that the future shall be better than the past." If Nigeria is to forge ahead economically, socially and politically, University education must be taken out of its present morass and it must be made more relevant, functional and sustainable, by integrating meaningful skill-acquisition programmes or entrepreneurship education into the curricula of the Universities, Adesina (2005) has succinctly remarked that:

For a country that is playing a leadership role in Africa, in world of pragmatic and competitive science and technology, the educational system must move away from sheer qualitative consideration to functionalism and relevance. The products of the Nigerian educational system should be able to take his place meaningfully in the society and make positive contributions to national development through the knowledge, skills and exposures that he has acquired from the educational system.

The issues that imbue one's mind at this juncture are:

- (a) What is relevant functional and sustainable university education?

- (b) What measures are to be adopted in making University education in Nigeria more relevant, functional and sustainable toward ameliorating the problem of graduate unemployment in Nigeria?

These thought provoking issues are critically discussed in this paper as follows:

The Concept of “Relevant, Functional and Sustainable University Education”

It is deemed pertinent to have a cursory look at the three variables inherent in this concept. These are “relevance”, “functionalism” and “sustainability”.

Relevant University Education

This entails the extent to which the University education is valid, suitable, efficient and of high standard. University education is said to be relevant when it adequately and effectively meets the desires and aspirations of the people yearning for such University education and what it delivers, with serve the purpose for which it is intended.

Functional University Education

This connotes the fitness, usefulness and appropriateness of the university education to the needs of daily life, the hopes and expectation for tomorrow and preparation for the uncertainties and challenges of the unknown future. University education can be adjudged to be functional when there is effective teaching; proper conduct of meaningful research; well administered virile staff development programmes; timely generation and dissemination of knowledge; maintenance of high academic standards; ensuring inter-institutional cooperation and well commitment and dedication to community services.

Sustainable University Education

This is the extent to which the University is able to maintain its standard and preserve its academic integrity, irrespective of the various economic and socio-political vicissitudes pervading the nation. This essentially entails proper funding adequate infra-structural support, adequate recruitment of highly motivated staff, effective management, and good monitoring of staff and students activities, without infringing on the well-orchestrated academic freedom on the campus.

Making University Education more Relevant, Functional and Sustainable for Ameliorating Graduate Unemployment in Nigeria

Before discussing the various measures to be adopted towards making University education in Nigeria more relevant, functional and sustainable in curbing graduate unemployment, it is considered necessary to examine some national policy statements on University education in Nigeria. As clearly indicated in Section 8, Paragraph 64, in the National Policy on Education (FRN, NPE, 2004), that University education shall make optimum contribution to national development by:

- (a) Intensifying and diversifying its programme for the development of high level manpower within the context of the needs of the nation;
- (b) Making professional courses to reflect our national requirements;

- (c) Making all students, as part of a general programme of all-round improvement in University education, to offer general study courses such as history of ideas, philosophy of knowledge and nationalism.

It is also stated in the policy that University research shall be relevant to the nation's development goals. In this regard, Universities shall be encouraged to disseminate their research results to both government and industries, while University teaching shall seek to inculcate community spirit in the students through projects and action research. (FRN, NPE, 2004). Based on these policy statements, it is quite apparent that Nigerian Universities are expected to pursue their lofty goals through, teaching, research, dissemination of existing and new information, pursuit of service to the community; and serving as store house of knowledge. The teaching and research functions, more than any other are very instrumental to the development of high level manpower that is central to national development.

The specific measures for making university education in Nigeria more relevant, functional and sustainable, so as to be able to ameliorate graduate unemployment are aptly discussed as follows:

Integration of Entrepreneurship Education into the Curricular of Nigerian Universities

Afolabi (2011) defined entrepreneurship education as “the inculcation in the individuals entrepreneurship, skills, knowledge, attitudes, abilities and competences that would make such individuals live happily and successfully in the society and contribute meaningfully to its development”. Also, Akanbi (2018) describes entrepreneurship education as “the acquisition of skills, knowledge, values and competences that make the recipient well grounded in the areas of business.”

The problem of graduate unemployment in Nigeria will be drastically reduced if entrepreneurship education is effectively entrenched into the programmes of Nigerian Universities. Such entrepreneurship education must specifically forms on how to increasingly make the products of these institutions self-employed and generators of employment for others. Towards effective integration of entrepreneurship education into the curricular of Nigerian Universities, the University administrators could adopt the following procedural steps.

- (a) Formation off the goal and aims of entrepreneurship education;
- (b) Procurement of physical and material resources for entrepreneurship education
- (c) Selection of appropriate curriculum and co-curricular activities.
- (d) Getting teaching and non-teaching staff and resource persons for entrepreneurship education.
- (e) Setting up Inspectoral Team for quality control. It is no gainsaying that through entrepreneurship education graduates of Nigerian universities will be properly equipped with entrepreneurial skills that will make them to be self-employed or employable in the public and private sectors of the economy.

Adequate Funding of the Universities

In recent times, the total allocation of funds from the political parties in power to the public Universities have been falling far short of financial requirements of the institutions. In most Federal and State Universities, many capital projects have been to be abandoned due to paucity of fund. Ironically, there is also, the problem of strict control of how the allocated funds should be spent. The University administrators have to comply strictly with the Government directive as regards the kind of projects on which the funds allocated should be

spent. In some cases, the Government Agencies that allocated the funds to the Universities award contract to their friend contractors who are members of their political party and inform the Vice-chancellors to supervise the project. Such Vice-Chancellors usually find it difficult to criticise such project if the contractors handling them are not following the prescribed specification.

Furthermore in most Nigerian Universities, essential modern teaching and research facilities are either inadequate or non-existent. While their libraries are ill-equipped with obsolete references and periodicals. Also, the staff welfare services are either inadequately provided or poorly administered. Consequently, these institutions have been witnessing incessant strikes in recent times. Therefore, to make University education in Nigeria more relevant, functional and sustainable, high premium should be placed on effective funding. According to Ogunu (2000) “adequate financial input is crucial to the success of any system of education because provision of facilities and equipment, payment of teaching and non-teaching personnel, procurement of materials and other needs is dependent upon availability of fund.” To achieve their lofty goal of producing high quality manpower for all sectors of the economy, Nigerian Universities must be adequately funded by all stakeholders of education. These include the households, firms and other industrial establishments, philanthropists, religious organisations and all the tiers of Government, that is, Local, State and Federal.

Adequate Provision of Physical Facilities and Modern Instructional Materials

Effective teaching, learning and researching in Nigerian Universities depend greatly on availability and adequacy of physical facilities and modern instructional resources. A relevant, functional and sustainable university education as a basis for ameliorating graduate unemployment in Nigeria will be an onerous task to achieve, if physical facilities and modern instructional resources are either non-existent or grossly inadequate in the University. Every Nigerian University should have adequate modern lecture rooms, lecture theatres, spacious and well conducive staff officer, well equipped automated libraries, well equipped laboratories and technical workshops, recreational centres and modern instructional resource. The use of Information Communication Technologies should be integrated into all programmes in the Universities.

Disentangle Policies from University Administration

To make Nigerian Universities more relevant, functional and sustainable in meeting yearnings and aspirations of Nigeria, especially in ameliorating the problem of graduate unemployment, there is an inevitable need to disentangle politics completely from University administration. For instance, the appointment of Vice-Chancellors and other Principal Officers into Nigerian Universities has been greatly susceptible to political manoeuvring. Since the Vice-Chancellor is the Chief Executive of his University and is accountable for whatever happens in his University, his appointment should be an overall decision of the University community.

Also, personal matters especially those relating to the appointment, promotion, confirmation, interdiction and termination of staff appointment and discipline of the University staff have been tainted with politics. Some members of staff in the various Universities who criticise vehemently the policies, plans and programmes of the ruling political parties have become victims of political vicissitudes. Such members of staff are being frustrated on the job, by not promoting them, despite meeting all the promotion. Conditions and often, they may be retrenched. This pathetic situation has compelled some lecturers and administration staff to resign their appointment prematurely. This has consequently added to the brain-drain in the Universities. Politics should be completely divorced from University administration, in order

to make University education more relevant, functional and sustainable to accomplish its lofty goal of meeting the nation's high quality manpower needs.

Proliferation of Universities in Nigeria should be done with Caution

Proliferation of Universities in Nigeria is seen by the politicians as a way of popularising their political parties to the electorate without considering the colossal amount of money it entails to run them. For instance, during the civilian administration led by former President Shehu Shagari between 1979 and 1983, the number of universities in Nigeria rose from 13 to 27, representing 98.0% increase within four years. The paucity of fund compelled some of these Universities to run satellite campuses, which put University education in Nigeria into academic perfidy and deteriorating standard. The Federal Government decision to close down these satellite campuses had brought sanity to University education in Nigeria.

Moreover, with the advent of the present democracy in May 1999, the Federal Government, some State Governors, Religious organisations and private individuals have made bold attempt to establish more Universities in Nigeria. The total number of Universities in Nigeria increased from 27 in 1983 to 113 as at January 2012, that is, additional 86 Universities representing 76.1% increase within twenty-nine years. Ironically, the labour market in Nigeria is already saturated with skilled manpower that only few graduates could be employed. Thus the problem of high rate of graduate unemployment continues to assure a serious dimension. Attention should be focused on how to effectively fund the existing Universities in Nigeria, ensure that they are well staffed with highly motivated teaching and non-teaching personnel and provision of modern teaching and learning resources in order to make the Universities more relevant, functional and sustainable particularly in this period of economic and socio-political vicissitude.

Conclusion

Ameliorating the problem of unemployment among graduates through relevant, functional and sustainable University education in Nigeria, would continue to be an onerous and Herculean task to achieve, as long as the various economic and socio-political vicissitudes pervading the institutions remain untackled. It is mandatory for all stakeholders of University education in Nigeria to provide all the necessary infrastructural support and adequate funding in aid of teaching and research in the institutions and for effective integration of entrepreneurship education for self-reliance into the academic programmes of the Universities. Moreover, all fraudulent and corrupt practices, political victimisation and selfish attitudinal dispositions in must be jettisoned in the Universalities. It needs to be emphasized that the training received and the skills acquired while in the Universities would be a monumental waste, if the University products are not maximally utilised in the service of the nation through gainful employment of the products.

Recommendations

The problem of graduate unemployment could be ameliorated through relevant, functional and sustainable university education, if the politicians put a halt to the proliferation of Universities in Nigeria as a way of popularising themselves to the electorates. Emphasis and attention should be on expanding and consolidating the available facilities in the Universities. Also, every university should have unfettered autonomy and academic freedom as regards staff appointment, staff development and welfare, staff discipline, students' admission, appointment of Vice-Chancellor and other Principal Officers in the University.

The curricular of Nigerian Universities should be more pragmatic and have built-in-job training programmes which will enable all students to acquire relevant entrepreneurial skills

needed for self-employment. It is mandatory for Federal, State and Local Government to widen their industrial base, diversity their economy and productive sector to enable easy absorption of University graduates into gainful employment. This approach will make University education more attractive, pleasurable and meaningful to Nigerian students.

The Nigerian Universities should be effectively funded. There is need to appraise periodically their sources of Internally Generated Revenue (IGR), with the sole aim of improving them. The funds allocated to the institutions by all stakeholders should be prudently managed and areas of wastage must be curtailed. Also, the National Universities Commission (NUC) must be properly funded and more empowered by the Federal Government for effective service delivery. The Government and University administrators should be sensitive to staff and students welfare problems, so as to avoid incessant strike actions and unpleasant closure of the Universities.

References

- [1] S. Adesina, *Growth without Development, Nigeria Educational Experience between 1914-2004*, (2005), Abeokuta: Educational Industries Nigeria Ltd.
- [2] O.M. Adepoju, Youth unemployment in Nigeria: Implications for peace, security and economic development, In V.O. Edo and E.F.K. Salami (eds), *Issues and Trends in Nigeria's Development*, (2012), Ibadan: John Archers Publishers.
- [3] F.O. Afolabi, Tertiary education and graduate unemployment in Nigeria: The need to revisit entrepreneurship education, *Development and Policy Issues in Africa*, 4(1) (2011), 61-62.
- [4] A.J. Ajayi and F.O. Afolabi, The role of tertiary education in national development: The Nigerian scenario, *Journal of Teacher Education*, 10(1) (2009), 35.
- [5] N.N. Akanbi, Vocational education and entrepreneurship: A complementary relationship, *31st Convocation Lecture of Adeyemi College of Education*, Ondo, Delivered in Olusegun Obasanjo Auditorium on Thursday 16th September (2010).
- [6] B. Aregbesola, Unemployment in Nigeria: On the Increase, In *Nigeria in America*, December 14 (2008), Retrieved from <http://www.nigerians in America.com>, on 3rd June (2011).
- [7] O. Balogun, Youth unemployment in Nigeria: A time bomb waiting to explode, In the *Marxism*, November 2 (2010).
- [8] Federal Government of Nigeria, *National Policy on Education*, (2004), Abuja, NERDC.
- [9] M. Ogunu, *Introduction to Educational Management*, (2000), Benin City: Mebogun Publishers.
- [10] D. Ojerinde, *Contemporary Educational Issues in Nigeria*, (2011), India: Melruse Books and Publishing Ltd.
- [11] O. Ray, *Entrepreneurship and Economic Development*, (1998), New York: Harper and Row.
- [12] P. Sharma, *Educational Administration*, (2008), New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Cooperation.