

PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTIONS ON YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES, PROSPECTS AND THE WAY FORWARD

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Abstract

This paper addresses philosophical reflections on the problem of youth unemployment in Nigeria. The paper argues that contrary to the positive reflection of their potentials, the face of the youth in Nigeria reflects poverty, deviance, criminality, hopelessness, spiritual wariness and political lethargy. This paper notes that the collapse of values, ethics, and morality also strikes at the heart of abrasive corruption which in turn dwarfs or reverses the processes of youth development. The paper thus discovers a robust positive relationship between corruption, youth unemployment and poverty in Nigeria. The paper is composed of five sections. Section one deals with introduction, while section two deals with conceptual clarifications and review of literature in which the concepts of youth unemployment, corruption and poverty are examined. In section three, the paper look at the relationship between corruption and high rising youth unemployment in Nigeria and found that corruption more than any other single factor has been and is still responsible for Nigeria's poverty. It is against this background that the paper in the fourth and final section recommends amidst others, value reorientation, requisite employment strategies and moral instruction as panacea to the menace of youth unemployment in Nigeria.

Keywords: unemployment, poverty, youth, corruption, national development.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the pressing challenges facing the Sub - Saharan African economies today is the trend of unemployment that has been on the increase over the years. Also, unemployment is one of the major challenges facing both developed and developing countries of the world. As it has been phrased, the phenomenon of graduate unemployment (GU) in the developing countries constitutes an unusual problem to both the labour market and the general economy of the affected countries. Oye, Ibrahim and Ahmad (2011) argued that “the state of unemployment demoralizes and increases the material need of those who are able and enthusiastic to work but cannot find jobs”. While unemployment is a global phenomenon, yet it is more prevalent in developing countries of the world, with resultant negative social, economic, political and psychological consequences (Ayinde, 2008; Emeka, 2011). Specifically, Nigeria’s current unemployment situation is erratic and fall short of expectations, such that a large percentage of educated, able and qualified citizens cannot secure paid employment (Omotosho, 2009).

One of the major concerns of various administrations in Nigeria is the growing rate of unemployment in the country and it has consistently formed a part of the macroeconomic objectives of the government for the past decades (Omotosho, 2009). According to the World Bank Report of 1993; the growing trend of employment and productivity of the Asian Tigers and Japan is responsible for their enviable and brilliant economic performances. But evidently, the absence of the necessary framework to enhance employment and productivity level in Nigeria is the sole cause of the retarded nature of Nigeria; the acclaimed giant of Africa. The negative trend and problem of unemployment in Nigeria remains obstinate with a tendency of growing geometrically at an alarming rate of 3 million unemployed youth annually (Adelodun, 2006).

According to Adebayo and Ogunrinola, (2006), argued that unemployment trend in Nigeria affects job seekers within the ages of 20 – 24 and 25– 44 years more while there is fewer prevalence of unemployment within the ages of 15 –19, 55 – 59 and 65 years and above. The rate of open unemployment was 12% in March 2005; it rose to 19.7% in March 2009 while the rate of underemployment hovered around 19% in 1998 (According to the National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). From this statistics, it is apparent that unemployment, particularly the unemployment of young graduates, hinders Nigeria’s progress in so many ways. Aside from its economic

implications, it also creates imminent danger for the political stability of the country (Ipaye, 1998). Consequently, massive youth unemployment as it is presently recorded in Nigeria portend a serious multifaceted problems and the threat of unemployment has gradually been acknowledged as a pressing challenge facing Nigeria (Ipaye, 1998, Udu & Ugu, 2005).

Umaru and Zubairu (2011), also noted that unemployment has been recognized as one of the major impediments to social-economic growth in most developing countries. For example, it reduces the aggregate output of the economy and results in underutilization of human resources. The need to avert the negative effects of unemployment has made the tackling of unemployment problems feature very prominently in the developmental objectives of many third world countries.(Omotor & Gbosi, 2006). The issue of real output and employment growth in developing nations is a sine qua non for poverty reduction and a more equitable income distribution (Fofana, 2001). Omotor and Gbosi (2006) noted that the seriousness and nature of unemployment in Nigeria is relatively high when placed on the same pedestal with those of other African countries. According to them, in absolute terms; it is estimated that there are presently about 22 million youths unemployed in Nigeria.

This paper attempted to show that youth unemployment constitutes a serious socio-economic problem in Nigeria and is really a tragic condition that requires urgent and proactive attention. Indeed, it is alarming and worrisome to observe that Nigeria's graduates who are educated, able and willing to work cannot find jobs. The situation is becoming hopeless, as the rate of unemployment keep rising without proactive attempt to curb the menace (Kayode, Samuel & Silas, 2014).

For example, a cursory look at the state of the nation, shows more danger for the country with the declining likely hood of young graduates becoming gainfully employed; especially with the trend of events in the country, including the falling oil prices, economic recession and insurgency in the Northern parts of the country among other factors. As a matter of fact, unemployment is one of the major developmental challenges facing Nigeria at the moment (Ipaye, 1998).

Obadan and Odusola (2010) noted that the prevalence of unemployment in Nigeria especially in the 21st century is getting deeper and more worrisome spreading through all phases of age groups, educational levels and geographical spread.

The challenges of lingering youth unemployment are very obvious in Nigeria, because every year thousands of graduates are turned out for whom there are no job opportunities (Emeka, 2011). The Nigerian labour market is characterized by youth hawkers who typically would have found beneficial employment in some organizations (Echebiri, 2005; Uwoma, 2006). Given the large percentage of unemployed youths, the trend of unemployment is capable of destabilizing national peace as it portends a serious security threat for Nigeria's nascent democracy. (Adepegba, 2011).

Youth Unemployment also has negative psycho-emotional consequences on the physical well-being of the affected. The unemployed have a high tendency to experience such feelings as downheartedness, melancholy, anger, acrimony and mortification (Goldney 1997). In addition, different forms of anti-social behavior including deceit, fraud, robbery and ferocity usually occur in a society with a large number of unemployed populace. Reynolds (2000) also identified other forms of mental and health disorders, such as drug abuse, sexual assault, unwanted pregnancies, prostitution, and psychosomatism as being associated with youth unemployment.

Also, compounding these challenges; is the absence of reliable statistics on the level of youth unemployment, as no organization has so far produced precise figures presenting the current youth unemployment rate in Nigeria (Udu & Agu, 2005). On most occasions, the figures released by National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), and the World Bank, appeared contradictory. The reason, alluded to the contradiction in employment statistics according to Raheen (1993), is the fact that only "open unemployment" is recognized and published by the official statistics. A review of extant statistics reveals that most studies conducted on Nigeria's youth employment nature and structure situations have been largely devoted to unemployment and its determinants and/or its impacts on economic growth (Adebayo & Ogunrinola, 2006; Omotor & Gbosi 2006). This paper therefore argued that there is a serious gap between the research and the official publication devoted to the investigation of the socio, economic and psychological effects of unemployment in Nigeria. Therefore the incomplete solutions offered to address this gap motivated this study and also emphasized the negative effects of unemployment on economic growth; its traumatizing effects on young Nigerians and the failure of the appropriate government agencies to specify the exact cause of unemployment that is peculiar to Nigeria.

The objective of this study is to show that there is a relationship between corruption and high rising youth unemployment in Nigeria in which corruption more than any other single factor has been and is still responsible for Nigeria's poverty.

Corruption, which has permeated the entire social structure of Nigeria, has robbed the country of developing a vibrant economic base. Funds meant for development projects have been misappropriated, diverted, or embezzled and stashed away in foreign banks, while incompetent and corrupt bureaucrats and administrators managing public enterprises and parastatal have bankrupted these organizations (Okafor, 2010). The point here is that the collaboration of the political elites, local and foreign contractors in the inflation of contract fees have robbed Nigeria of the chances of using more than \$500 billion estimated revenue from crude oil sales in the last 50 years to develop a vibrant economy that would have created jobs for the youths in various sectors of the economy. The ruling (political) class has failed because it has replaced the vision, policy and strategy, which should be the thrust of national leadership with transactions (contract award and other mundane money-related activities), as each successive government continue to take turns to prey on the nation's wealth, by using public power, resources, good will, utilities, instrument of abuse, for personal gains thereby, crippling the economy and worsening youth unemployment which has led to abject poverty, hunger and frustration. (Okafor, 2005).

Effects of Unemployment Problems in Nigeria

The following are some of the effects of unemployment in Nigeria:

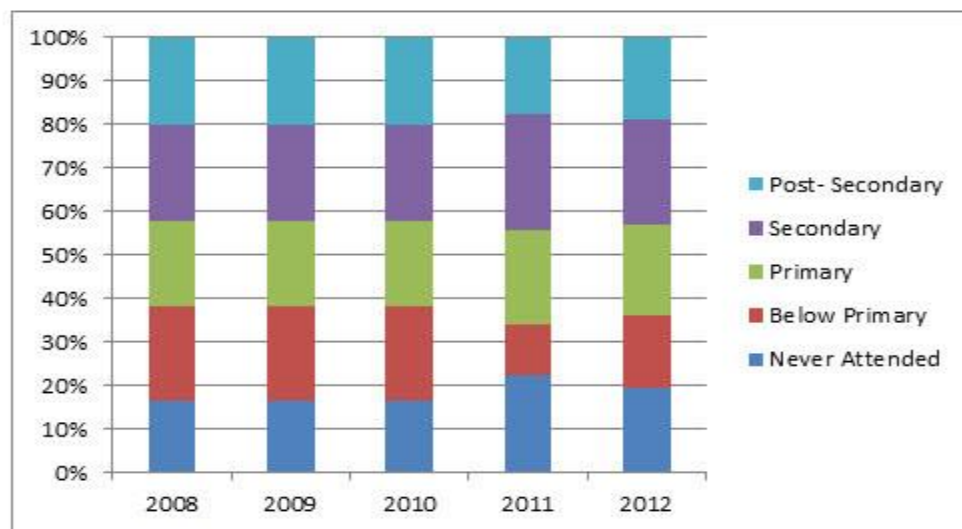
Inequality of Income: Inequality of income is one of the effects of youth unemployment in Nigeria. The National Bureau of statistics opined that in 2010 65% of Nigeria's wealth is owned by 20% of the population, which manifest itself in so many dimensions such as concentration of wealth on the hands of few individual while many are in abject poverty.

Inequality of income, poverty and youth unemployment has led to increase in violent crimes in Nigeria. Hillary (2012) asserted that the crisis in Nigeria was a result of failure of governance to address socio-economic issues facing the nation.

Boko Haram: According to the world investment report of the United Nations Centre for Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the Nigeria's economy witnessed a decline in foreign direct

investment (FDI) from USD 8.65 billion in 2009 to USD 6.1 billion in 2010 due to activities of Boko Haram. Sanusi (2012) opined that Nigeria's slower growth rate could be attributed to corruption and political obstacles associated with the removal of fuel subsidy. In addition, youth unemployment resulted in increased activities of Boko Haram and many other crimes going on in the affected areas especially the north-west and north east of Nigeria which resulted in closure of schools. In a place like Jos, people were divided along ethnic lines due to unemployment and poverty.

Figure 1: National Youth Unemployment Figures (15-34 years) by Education, 2008-2012



Source: NISER, 2013

Several factors may be blamed for the prevalence of youth unemployment in Nigeria. There is a high population growth rate—3.5 percent per annum—which accompanied an already large national population of over 167 million people. In addition, deficient school curricula and poor teacher's training have contributed to the failure of educational institutions in Nigeria to provide students the appropriate skills to make them employable. Since schools in rural areas are generally more deficient in infrastructure, teaching facilities and teacher quality than schools in urban areas and this may help account for the high growth in rural unemployed youth. Some experts suggested that the major jump in rural youth unemployment. Shows in the table above, could be due to the mass failure in national examinations conducted among final-year secondary school students in 2010, which made many of them unemployable in 2011.

Review of Related Literature

Unemployment: An Overview

According to Njoku and Ihugba (2011), the trend of unemployment in Nigeria has been going upward over several decades. Youth unemployment in Nigeria is defined as “the ratio of labour force that are willing and able to work but did not work in the week preceding the survey period for at least 39 hours”. Official statistics from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) placed the figure of unemployed at 19.70 per cent representing about 30 million youth, but this estimate excluded about 40 million other Nigerian youths captured in World Bank statistics in 2009. The statistics above have gone a long way to show that about 50 percent of Nigerians population are unemployed.

Unemployment rate is the most widely used as the indicator of the well-being of any labour market and also as an important measure of the state of an economy in general (Bryne & Strobl, 2009). According to Bryne and Strobl (2009), real-world implementation of these guidelines is, however, mostly problematic. For instance, some economists claimed that availability and readiness to work are adequate to differentiate workers in the labour force from the employed ones.

Youth unemployment is described as a condition in which persons skilful and willing to work are unable to find suitable paid employment (Udu&Agu, 2005). The International Labour Organisation(ILO) (2007) defined unemployed workers as “those who are presently not working but are enthusiastic and able to work for pay, currently available to work and have aggressively searched for work”. Hornby (2010) viewed unemployment as the evidences of a number of people not having a job, and the circumstances of not having jobs. According to Kayode, Samuel and Silas (2014) argued that economists have categorized the numerous overlapping types (or causes) of unemployment: These are: seasonal unemployment structural unemployment, frictional unemployment, transitional unemployment, hidden unemployment, and classical unemployment. These authors, further noted that, a critical analysis of the several types of unemployment reveals that unemployment can be voluntary or involuntary.

Methodology

Data for this paper were derived from secondary sources of previous researches and analysis of scholars, government documents, newspaper as well as journal articles that are related to the subject of study.

Discussion and Findings

This paper noted that whatever the demographic statistics and the political myopia of the ruling class may assume, Nigeria is still confronted with the social dynamics that requires not only the relevance of the Nigerian youths but also their manifest destiny in the rehabilitation of the national project.

The challenge therefore is that of how Nigeria youth can be liberated from the vicious cycle in which they are caught: on the one hand, youths, as their rights and responsibilities, are called to eschew non-desirable behaviour in the society such as crimes and acts of violence and on the other hand, they are caught up in the web of such acts. A true representation of the situation therefore must affirm that to be responsible, the Nigerian youths must be liberated from this vicious cycle (Chukwuebuka, 2011).

Recommendations and Policy Implications

Government at all levels, (local, state and federal) should develop proactive strategies to reposition the economy towards ameliorating the unemployment problems in Nigeria and its devastating effects on national development. Undoubtedly, reduction in youth's unemployment will transform into reduction in crime, and other negative vices that prevents sustainable national development.

In addition, government should also develop a policy framework that will encourage massive investment in agriculture, especially by making agric – business stimulating, creative and innovative enough to spur youth interest. Since the teeming youth represent an important part of any society they should be encouraged to channel their energies to national development by being positively involved in the drive for national growth.

Furthermore, government should rejuvenate all the vocational training institutes across the country to offer entrepreneurship training. This will go a long way to address youth unemployment. Upon completion of the training programmes, government should also offer soft

loans to the trained youths as take-off capital. Finally, to ameliorate the devastating effect of youth unemployment, government at all levels in Nigeria should provide the necessary infrastructure and also create the enabling environment that will propel industrial growth and survival.

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