

Psychosocial Implications of Increasing Rate of Unemployment among Youths in Nigeria

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Abstract

Unemployment is a permanent feature of all economies, whether weak or strong. This is because full employment is not realizable. However, the rate of unemployment is a mirror, projecting the economic strength or weakness of any economy. Even in the absence of any accurate data on unemployment in Nigeria, the unfolding events have shown that its rate is on the increase. Since any unbearable rate of unemployment will have tolls, both on the citizens and the country at large, the study therefore set three-fold objectives which were to: one, trace historically, the crisis of unemployment in Nigeria; two, present the different manifestations of unemployment; and lastly, appraise both the psychological and social effects of its increasing rate. The study methodology was a mix of systematic observation, interviews and reliance on secondary data sources such as bulletins, newspapers and magazines. The study concluded that unemployment among the Nigerian youth was on the increase and it had psycho-social implications but which varied on regional basis.

Keywords: Psychosocial, Unemployment, Youths, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Modern mode of production, distribution and consumption of goods and services has made unemployment (low or high rate) to become a feature of all economies (strong or weak). This is because full employment is not realizable. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2012), reported a global unemployment rate of 400 million. This report further stated that youths are particularly hit by the crises of unemployment as they are nearly three times as likely as adults to be unemployed. In order to generate sustainable growth globally, and maintain social cohesion, the report noted that the world must create 600 million productive jobs over the next decade even though this will still leave 900 million workers below the US\$2 a day, especially in developing countries. This shows that unemployment as a global phenomenon has differing rates from one country to another.

Nigeria has been one of the countries of the world that is mostly affected by crises of unemployment. Alanana (2003) revealed that even when the economy was buoyant in Nigeria, the following rates of unemployment were recorded: 6.2% in the 1970s, 9.8% in the 1980s, 11.5% in the 1990s. The current rate of 23.9% by the Bureau of Statistics Office (2012) indicates poor economic management and worse employment situation. People still cast doubts on the current rate of 23.9% believing this was grossly under-reported.

Chukwuemeka, Okoye, Muo and Anazodo (2012) recounted that at a time in Nigeria, higher education certificates were highly honoured and viewed as meal tickets enabling holders to live above poverty line. During the period, many undergraduates could secure jobs even before graduation as the economy was flourishing. In the contemporary times, the situation is no longer the same.

2. Conceptual Clarifications

Meaning and Forms of Unemployment

The ILO (1998) defined the unemployed as persons who are currently available for work, seeking for work, but are unable to find work. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2012) defined unemployment as the proportion of those who were searching for work but could not find any for at least 40 hours during the reference period to the currently active (labour force) population. In this study, an unemployed youth was taken to be a Nigerian of between 18 and 35 years with requisite educational qualification(s), willing and able to work for salary or wages but unable to find one. Unemployment comes in different dimensions; a review of the types/forms of unemployment may be necessary in order to fully comprehend the Nigerian situation.

Structural unemployment occurs when a change in the organization/arrangement of the economy of a country results in a change in the tastes of the people or changes in the technology. **Frictional unemployment** arises from an industrial friction such as lack of knowledge of job opportunities, breakdown of machinery, and shortage of raw materials. In this instance, job may be available but people remain unemployed due to some of the identified factors.

Seasonal unemployment results from seasonal variations in the nature of some industrial activities as climate changes. **Cyclical unemployment** occurs when the demand for the product of a particular industry falls below the full employment level of output. Lastly, **disguised unemployment** is an under-employment situation in which more

than required number of persons engages in a particular job (Njoku & Ihugba, 2011). Indeed, all of these unemployment types are clearly visible in Nigeria, which is a reflection of worst unemployment situation.

Many reasons have been adduced for the current unemployment situation Nigeria. Of great significance is the increase in the number of graduates of the Nigerian institutions of higher learning without corresponding job opportunities to absorb them. The National Bureau of Statistics (2012) reported that about 1.8 million new youths enter into the labour market yearly in the last five years and this is without a corresponding job opportunity to absorb them. The report pointed out that as at 2010, there were a total number of 104 universities, 75 polytechnics, and 88 colleges of education in Nigeria turning out graduates yearly into the labour market with only a few opportunities. Also, the National Youth Service Corps, a mandatory one year national youth programme, could no longer absorb Nigerian graduates all at once into the programme but has devised a three-batch yearly absorption programme. For example, Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) Ile-Ife alone, where the authors work graduated 8,612 students in December 2012 alone (OAU Bulletin, 2012). In summary, youth unemployment in Nigeria could be blamed mainly on the imbalance in the interaction of supply by the Nigerian universities and demand of graduates by the labour market.

In addition to high graduate outputs of the Nigerian universities yearly, employers of labour have consistently stressed the fact that Nigerian graduates are increasingly becoming unemployable due to their lack of “non-academic” qualifications (Akinyemi, Ofem, & Ikuenomore, 2012). While many of the graduates were well groomed in the core cognitive areas of their disciplines, they were rated to lack basic technical skills to function well in work organisations. These have been hinged upon poor quality staff, poor funding, and poor curriculum development (Dabaleni, Oni, & Adekola, 2000; Godwin & Johnson, 2012; Akinyemi *et al.* 2012). For a better understanding of unemployment situation in Nigeria, a historical elucidation is considered very necessary. The next subheading presents the history.

3. History of Unemployment in Nigeria

Omotosho, Idowu, Esere, & Arewah (2009) pointed out that unemployment was never an issue of national concern in the first two decades of independence in Nigeria. The crises of youth unemployment began to be felt in the country around 1980s. Prior to this period, agriculture was the mainstay of the Nigerian economy. Each of the three regions (Northern, Western and Eastern regions) was doing well in core domains of agricultural sector. Indeed agricultural sector alone generated about 70% of the nation’s employment and accounted for about 80% of the Gross Domestic Product (Omotosho *et al.* 2009). During this period, cocoa production was booming in the West, cotton in the North and rubber plantation in the East. The discovery of oil in the 70s which should have complemented success in agriculture drew attention away from it. Tacitly, oil proceeds generated attitudinal problems where people began to see those involved in agriculture as less privileged. As discussed earlier, provision was not made to absorb increased number of school leavers especially in the Southwestern region where there has been free education programme since 1976. The available/existing workplaces were also mainly service-oriented. The manufacturing sector, which could create ease of managing recurrent expenditure to maintain workers was and is still not developed.

Arising from the foregoing is the fact that youth unemployment in Nigeria could not be given general history because of differences in the rates at which each region was turning out graduates. Unemployment was only first observed and pronounced among holders of National Certificate in Education (NCE) and people with Diploma Certificates in the North. In the East, people could be said not to have enjoyed free education at all, even till date. An online interview by the authors revealed that as now, University of Nigeria Nsukka has fourteen (14) hostels and out of which ten (10) are used by female students. This pointed to the fact that males are showing reduced interest in university education. It is not a misnomer for a female with Ph.D. degree to be married to a wealthy trader with or without university education in that region. This implies that certificate-enabled job seekers in the Eastern Nigeria will mostly be females. Overall, however, complaints of unemployment may not be that pronounced in the Eastern Nigeria as marriage might have solved the problem of care/sustenance which husbands are culturally expected to make provision for. With this background, unemployment has been portrayed more prominent in the southwest than anywhere in Nigeria.

Not only are young people the most likely to be affected when unemployment rates are high, there is also the danger that the psycho-social effects of unemployment on young people may be more damaging, both to the individual and to society, than its effects on older people (Winefield, Tiggemann, Winefield, & Goldney, 2005). This was the motivation for this study.

It has been shown in many studies that unemployed youths show poorer psychological well-being than their employed counterparts (Banks and Jackson, 1982; Stokes, 1983; Tiggemann and Winefield, 1980). In cases where the effects are more severe, perhaps following prolonged periods of unemployment, there may be effects that require some sort of intervention. The effects may range from emotional disorders such as anxiety or depression to

psychosomatic disorders such as hypertension, headaches, ulcer and dermatitis. The emotional problems, if not treated, may lead to various forms of anti-social behaviour. These are likely to include wife and child abuse, alcoholism or other forms of drug abuse, as well as criminal activities such as housebreaking and shoplifting.

It is a widely held popular view that unemployed youngsters tend to become engaged in delinquent or criminal acts (Donovan, Oddy, Pardoe and Ades 1986). Some scholars have expressed the fear that young unemployed people, even if they do not commit criminal acts, may engage in various forms of rebellious activities, are more likely to become isolated, apathetic, and helpless (Coleman and Hendry, 1990). A more realistic cause for concern is that unemployed youngsters will develop socially undesirable attitudes to work.

Warr (1983) lists nine potentially negative features of unemployment based on findings from a number of empirical investigations. First, because unemployment usually implies reduced income, financial anxiety is frequently observed. Second, partly due to not having to leave home, and partly due to reduced income, the variety of life tends to be restricted. Third, there are fewer goals in the life of the unemployed person. Fourth, unemployment leads to a reduction in the scope of decision making. Of course, there is endless scope for decision making with respect to trivial matters such as when to get up, or whether to watch television, but not with respect to significant decisions that might have wide or long term consequences. Fifth, the satisfaction derived from the practice of skill or expertise is denied. Sixth, unemployment frequently leads to an increase in psychologically threatening activities. Seeking unsuccessfully for jobs, and trying to borrow money, for example, are both likely to entail unpleasant rebuffs and interactions with others of a humiliating kind. A seventh associated consequence is insecurity about the future. The last two consequences affect social life and status. The number of social contacts for the unemployed person is clearly reduced, although this does not necessarily imply a reduction in the amount of social contact. Warr and Payne (1983), for example, found that unemployed men reported spending more time with friends and neighbours since they became unemployed. Finally, social status is generally related to employment status. Thus an unemployed person will have lost, or failed to acquire, an accepted social position. The unemployed status is widely regarded as inferior and this is likely to result in the unemployed person being held in low esteem by others, as well as experiencing low self-esteem.

Meanwhile, some factors moderate the effects of the unemployment on the unemployed. This may include age, sex, ethnic origin, length of unemployment, personality, availability of social support, prevailing unemployment levels, access to constructive and stimulating leisure activity, and attitude displayed by the unemployed.

Several theories have been proposed to explain the psychological significance of employment. Jahoda (1981, 1982) proposed a deprivation theory. According to her, employment (even bad employment) has five latent functions that are psychologically beneficial: it imposes a time structure on the working day; it provides social contact; it involves people in shared goals; it gives workers an identity; and it enforces activity. The vitamin model (Watts, 1987) suggested nine features of the environment that seem to have a curvilinear effect on mental health, just as certain vitamins seem to affect physical health. Without suggesting that employment is necessarily better than unemployment in terms of these nine features, most good jobs provide them. Unlike deprivation theory then, the vitamin model clearly distinguishes between good and bad employment (as well as good and bad unemployment).

Erikson's (1959) developmental theory is relevant to an understanding of the consequences of youth unemployment. The theory assumes eight developmental stages throughout the life span. The main task of the fifth of these stages, adolescence, is supposed to be the development of identity (both sexual and occupational). Failure to negotiate successfully each developmental stage is believed to lead to later psychological problems.

A further reason to suppose that the lack of previous, successful employment experience may influence a young person's response to unemployment is suggested by the theory of learned helplessness (Seligman, 1975). This theory assumes that prolonged failure to control important outcomes will result eventually in the generalised expectation that such outcomes are uncontrollable. This expectation will produce three behavioural deficits: cognitive, motivational and affective (or emotional). The theory would make the following three predictions. First, unemployed people should tend to become helpless, showing all three of the associated behavioural deficits (cognitive, motivational and affective). Second, young people, because they lack previous experience of successful employment, will not be immunised against the effect, and should thus be at greater risk than others should. Third, young unemployed people who characteristically attribute bad outcomes to internal, stable causes and good outcomes to

external, unstable causes, should be those most likely to suffer from depression (Abramson, Seligman and Teasdale, 1978; Peterson and Seligman, 1984).

4. Methods

The study relied both on primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data were obtained through observations and interviews while secondary data were derived from bulletins, newspapers and magazines. In all, a hundred and twenty (120) interviews were held and in which ninety-five (95) involved face-to-face interviews and twenty-five interviews were conducted with the use of cell phones. All interviewees were chosen by convenience. The categories of interviewees involved were: ninety-five (95) youths who were never employed and twenty-five youths who were employed before, 20 who were victims of retrenchment and 5 who voluntarily disengaged. The 80% rate of retrenchment-caused unemployment has shown the reality of employment situation in Nigeria that job security level is very low.

5. Findings

The age distribution showed that 12.5 percent of the unemployed youths in this study were below 25 years and 87.5% were between 25 and 35 years. Also, 68.3% of them were males and 31.7% were females, 76.7% were Christians and 23.3% were Muslims. The distribution by marital status showed that 54.1% were single, 41.7% were married, 1.7% were separated and 2.5% were divorced. It can be inferred that marriage is still a cherished institution in Nigeria, whether delayed or not and even if it is not so convenient.

Systematic observation revealed that it was difficult to distinguish, by appearance, those who were employed or not. The unemployed still dressed well and did not appear malnourished. But the increase in the number of youths with unacceptable hairstyles that cannot come from a worker and those with mental impairments on the street, pointed to engagement of the unemployed youths in dangerous act of drug use/abuse, prostitution, illegal association with ritualists and probably, depression from excessive thinking. This signifies a significant depreciation in value system as depicted also by Adetipe (2013). Some of them speak good English as they displayed madness/abnormality at motor parks or walked on the streets. Some youths were observed to engage in social networking to defraud others, either with internet or other means. A number of them are car owners without a job. Some complained of unemployment but they already created a kind of lifestyle that will be difficult to sustain even if there is employment opportunity later.

Other findings discovered from the outcome of the study are as discussed below:

- i. Increase in enrolment for graduate studies: In the absence of real data on the graduate studies in Nigerian universities, casual observations have shown that there is a real notable increase in the number of enrolments for graduate programmes. In the absence of gainful employment, Nigerian youths now prefer taking up graduate programmes in order to keep away time rather than mere stay at home. It also serves as avenue to be among other youths who are also jobless. This tends to keep hope alive and reduce the impact of unemployment.
- ii. Increase in enrolment in apprenticeship/craftsmanship even after graduation: In the recent times, there is an increment in the number of applicants for apprenticeship/craftsmanship before, during and after graduation. Nigerian youths now believe that the possibility of getting job after graduation is not certain, therefore to be on a safer side will be to get themselves engaged in self-employment.
- iii. Taking up of menial jobs. Many employers of labour now take advantage of the unemployment situation by under-employ or offer menial jobs to the youths. There is no value for certificate again as many are being paid what is far below their academic worth (Azuh, 2013)
- iv. Fraudulent acts – some youths are found engaging in fraudulent acts such as internet fraud usually referred to as *yahoo-yahoo* in Nigeria.
- v. Delayed marriage: Because there is no means of sustaining family, delayed marriage now serves as option for the unemployed youths. This, though, has its own detriment as there is now increased rate of cohabitation, abandoned children, grand parenting among others.
- vi. Involvement in illicit drug use and/ or trafficking, bunkering, kidnapping, gangsterism, and ritualism are also part of the manifestations of youth unemployment in Nigeria. Many of the armed robbers, buglers, drug carriers, kidnappers in Nigeria are university graduates.
- vii. Increased migration – Unemployment forces many unemployed youths to flee the rural areas to the urban areas in search of greener pastures. Of course, this has led to urban congestion in many instances. Many

Nigerian cities have now become unbearable because of overpopulation and crime. The infrastructural facilities in those cities are overstretched. Also cross-border migration is also on the increase as Nigerian youths are in constant search for opportunities to leave the shore of the country.

Adetipe (2013) in the Guardian of 28th February 2013 highlighted the effects of youth unemployment in Nigeria as: decreased value system, increased armed bandits, increased insecurity of life and property, kidnapping and militancy, terrorism, political thuggery; and fraudulent recruitment scheme (Punch Editorial, March 24, 2013). Also, former President Obasanjo (Guardian, 27th March, 2013) recently likened Nigeria's unemployment level to "time bomb" which may explode into crises at any moment except something drastic is done.

Some interviews who consented to allowing their names to be used generated the following findings: Sakirat Olukayode is a Masters degree holder but works as a school teacher in one of the nursery & primary schools in Ile-Ife. She commented as follows:

"I lost my father at the age 8, My mother struggled to send me to school. I obtained my first degree in Microbiology in 2006. I thought life will be better with higher degree so I decided to go for masters but no job still. Since I have to make all ends meet, I decided to pick up this teaching job where I am being paid ₦15, 000 per month with the hope that better job offer will come."

Folakemi Olagoke is a tailor in Ile-Ife but holds a Bachelor's degree. She also commented as follows:

"I am a graduate of Adeyemi College of Education Ondo. I have submitted many job applications but to no avail. So I decided to learn a trade and here I am today, I am doing fine with tailoring business."

Iyabode Olagunju also recounted her joy when as she was offered by part time teaching job in one of the distance learning campuses:

"See, I cannot explain how happy I am that I eventually got this job after 9 years of my graduation. Every morning when I wake up, I pick my certificate and I pray on it that you are not meant to be kept inside the wardrobe but to secure a job for me. I was offered opportunity of delivering 2 hours of lecture per week at the rate of ₦1000 per hour. I am very happy"

John Emeka is a postgraduate student in one of the Universities in southwestern Nigeria. On why he has not married, he replied thus:

"Me marry? What will I use to feed the wife? This is my fifth year in this hostel. I have no job, no accommodation. So how will somebody like me manage a family?"

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

All these findings have shown that Nigerian youths are facing myriads of problems caused by employment. To forestall normalcy, a great deal of commitment is required on the parts of all the stakeholders – the government, universities, and the youths. On the part of the government, proper funding of the educational systems is necessary. This is to ensure the acquisition of necessary teaching aids that will facilitate the production of quality graduates. The National Youth Service Corps programme also needs to be revisited. In addition to the mandatory one-year national service, university graduates need to be empowered on how to be self reliant after graduation. Self-employed youth should be offered financial assistance. Government should endeavour to revitalise the agricultural sector. Graduates who are interested in farming should be highly encouraged by providing them with all necessary assistance that will make them succeed. Corruption should be seriously dealt with.

University educational curriculum should be revisited by incorporating vocational/artisanal courses into the system. This is to ensure that graduates are not only prepared for white collar jobs but are also well groomed to be self-reliant. Work study programmes should be incorporated into higher educational programmes to ensure students are exposed to the experience of the world of work before graduating. Also, standard should be emphasized in the recruitment and placement of academic staff to ensure that quality teachers are recruited. Yearly performance evaluation criteria should be put in place, and opportunity for training and retraining should be made available to lecturers.

The youths should understand the fact that government alone cannot provide all the jobs. They must be ready to seek guidance and counselling while seeking admission to the university.

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