

## **Structural Curriculum Reform and Unemployment among Youths in Nigeria: Implications for Peace and Development**

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**Abstract:** *The state of unemployment among youths has become a critical and alarming issue in the whole world and Nigeria in particular. This article therefore, reviews the state of unemployment among youths in Nigeria with impact of curriculum reform structure on job creation and a way forward towards this predicament. Findings from review indicate that the situation is indeed worsening despite the curriculum reform structure geared towards job creation. A great deal of research has indicated and attributed this problem to poor curriculum structure and implementation, poor policy amongst others. This has great implication to economic development, peace and security in the nation. However, several ways forward were highlighted in areas of training, implementation, and paradigm shift in curriculum, and policy formulation.*

**Keywords:** *Curriculum, Nigeria, reform, unemployment, youths.*

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### **Introduction**

Curriculum could be defined as ‘permanent’ subjects that embody essential knowledge; those subjects that are most useful for contemporary living; all planned learning’s for which the school is responsible; the totality of learning experiences so that students can attain general skills and knowledge at a variety of learning sites; what the students construct from working with the computer and its various networks, such as internet; the questioning of authority and the searching for complex views of human situations (Marsh, 2006, pp. 3-4). Whatever definition that is given to curriculum, it is a planned and guided learning experiences carried out in the institution for the purpose of living a useful and productive life in our contemporary society today. The academic bias of curricula has been blamed in many countries, including Nigeria for divorcing education from the world of work. Because of this academic bias, people who would normally have gone into some productive activity turn to fruitless search for white –collar employment and most countries’ (particularly in Nigeria) productive sectors can no longer support the expansion of white-collar employment. The academic type of curricula in this case, catered for the needs of a small minority who are likely to end up in professional jobs. However, there is need to examine the structural reforms in Nigeria curriculum in order to determine a way forward.

The alarming unemployment situation in Nigeria today calls for a curriculum planning and reform that must look critically at the Nigeria context in relation to the present and future needs. Students spend years, money, time and efforts in higher institutions specializing in an area of study without assurance of job creation by the government or self. Nigeria is a country endowed with lots of mineral and natural resources such as crude oil and gas deposits that are tapped and still untapped, agricultural produce (groundnuts, millets, rice, and palm oil e.t.c), natural waters with aquatic organisms; skilled human resources with about 96 federal, states & private universities, 50 polytechnics, 73 colleges of education among others yet youth unemployment have perpetually remained high. Learners’ are expected to acquire skills, knowledge, values and attitude from the curriculum which should be reflected in their search for employment. Yet these expectations are not realized in the society of today. If nations like Botswana, Japan, china and Malaysia that are not as rich as Nigeria naturally, are striving very high in technology, industry and improvement in employment, why can’t Nigeria do better? The major cause of this problem could definitely not

be disassociated with poor curriculum structure and reform among other factors such as greed, improper planning and implementation, budgeting & management.

This has implications for national security and development of the country which could lead to protest, instability, poverty, civil unrest, terrorism and crimes of different kinds as been reported in countries such as Spain, Greece, and UK (Obata, 2013). Nigeria is at a critical point where her educational system ought to work in order to reduce unemployment amongst graduates. China is running with her plans to create a big pool of entrepreneurs through technical skills acquisition while Germany has been described as an intern nation (Keluro, 2011).

The use of internship has been one of the reasons Germany is a role model in the engagement of her youths towards job opportunity. These youths are caught early and trained in different trades and technical skills before they move into a university if they choose to. It is not hard to see that they get into the workplace ready and even set up shops for themselves. It is on this backdrop that the demand for vocational education should be pursued with all vigour. Unemployment is a ticking time-bomb; poor enrollment of students in vocational schools needs to be revisited according to (Keluro, 2011). Gone are the days when parents Shawn vocational schools.

As an educationalist, the researcher needs to tackle this from the educational point of view. For this reason, the questions are:

1. What is the state of unemployment in Nigeria?
2. How has structural curriculum reform influenced unemployment in Nigeria?
3. What could be the implication of this problem to national peace and development in Nigeria?
4. What is the way forward to improving rising unemployment status in Nigeria?

These questions when answered could go a long way to eradicating the problem of unemployment among youths in Nigeria.

### **State of Unemployment in Nigeria**

It was stated in PMnews Nigeria that the present education curriculum is responsible for unemployment in the country (PMNews, 2012). It is believed that the curriculum was not designed to meet the emerging needs and challenges of the nation. There is a fundamental defect in the nation's education system and a revisit of the curriculum will go a long way in addressing unemployment in the country. Most graduates seek employment in sectors where they lack requisite skills, for example a graduate of History working in the oil sector instead of students that are trained in petroleum technology. These are the kind of situation found in Nigeria today due to corruption in job market. The system of education should be such that imbues in students the necessary vocational and technical skills to be self reliant after graduation, instead of relying on non-existing white collar jobs. The idea of white collar jobs however emanated during the colonial era, but before going into that era, it would be pertinent to know the theory of unemployment in Nigeria.

#### ***This theory must be traced from the pre-colonial era.***

In the pre- colonial era according to Eze (2010), children were brought up to adulthood with relevant cultural skills based on the values and needs of the society. It appears that in pre-colonial times, our unschooled ancestors prepared their children to adulthood with relevant skills and values in relation to the needs and reality of their society and they fit without irrelevance or mismatch to cause unemployment (Eze, 2010). But, along the way foreigners replaced the ancestors in this role and schooled youths out of their relevant skills meant for their real existence which automatically led them out of touch with their indigenous values and technology. This pattern has continued to be reproduced and badly exaggerated since after the foreign teacher was gone (Eze, 2010).

***In colonial times***, according to Eze, educated people in Nigeria had colonial masters' jobs waiting for them upon graduation as created by the colonial administration. Indigenous people resident in their villages were still engaged in local occupations like farming, weaving, hunting, fishing, music, building, traditional medical practice, traditional religious practice, trading, barbing, hair-dressing, making of mounds, wine tapping, palm- produce, butchering, etc. According to Eze,

unemployment was not then in Nigerian's indigenous dictionary. The experience of unemployment in Nigeria followed much later in the post colonial era and has continued to increase with no solution (Eze, 2010). Nigeria has witnessed many ugly situations since colonial era and the system has continued this way with terrible corrupt practices.

*Post-colonial era* was associated with urban migration in the search for government work (Eze, 2010). The work attitude of more pleasure with less work or no work at all has corrupted and bedeviled the Nigerian system. Every seeker of employment wants to be employed in the government not necessarily for the passion to serve but as a quick way to earn big money and do less work. This attitude negates supervision, work evaluation and the correction necessary for the growth and transformation of any system (Eze, 2010). If the colonial administrators did some education planning to match graduate output with available jobs created by the system, unemployment would have been averted according to Eze. A comparison of graduate employment then and in the years following independence with the present situation is disturbing and raises serious questions and concern (Eze, 2010).

Nigeria's growing unemployment is one of a major concern to many analysts and economists as the figures increasingly suggest dwindling potentials. Official figures from the Bureau of statistics puts this figure at about 20% (about 30million), but this figure still did not include about 40 million other Nigerian youths captured in World Bank statistics in 2009 (Unegbu, 2011). Despite the increase in unemployment, the structure of curriculum reform seems to be held accountable for the decline in the state of unemployment in Nigeria.

### **Structural curriculum reforms and impact on employment in Nigeria**

Nigeria under British control reflected the needs of the colonial government in their curriculum. This aggravated the need for the change and innovations which has been prevalent in the educational systems of the country. Thus, Nigeria had the 7-5-4 which represents 7 years of primary education, 5 years of secondary education and 4 years of tertiary education. In some regions, it was 6-5-4 across the three tiers respectively. This educational system was later replaced for the entire country in 1983 by the 6-3-3-4, that is, 6 years of primary education, 3 years of Junior Secondary School (JSS), 3 years of Senior Secondary School (SSS) and, 4 years of tertiary education. The splitting of the secondary education into 2 tiers: Junior and Senior Secondary is the difference. This system sought to correct the structural imbalances in the colonial system of education. Many people regarded the National Policy on Education (NPE) as both an innovation and as a reform in education. According to Alade(2011), it is a reform in that it introduced a 6-3-3-4 school system incorporating a nine year basic education programme as a clear departure from what existed in the past.

Also, the Universal Primary Education (UPE) which was launched in Nigeria in 1976, and now Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999 called for innovation in curriculum development, classroom teaching techniques, and supervision of instructional programmes in the existing schools. The Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) monitored this scheme which was seen as a free and a right of every child. The law establishing UBEC stipulates a 9-year formal schooling, adult literacy and non-formal education, skill acquisition programmes and the education of special groups such as nomads and migrant, girl-child and women, Al-majiri street children and disabled group (Aderinoye, 2007 as cited in Alade, 2011). However, poor implementation of the reforms inherent in the 6-3-3-4 system of education did not allow innovations and changes to have an appreciable impact on Nigeria Society (Ajibola, 2008). Meanwhile, the UBE is regarded as the foundation for sustaining life-long learning and providing reading, writing and numeracy and life skills.

These structural innovations also gave rise to radical changes made in curriculum content. The content of the subjects studied at primary, secondary and tertiary institutions levels have been reviewed geared towards achieving the national objectives for sustainable education and job creation. A major innovation is the requirement for technical and vocational subjects tagged as pre-vocational subjects. In addition, a range of contemporary courses and programmes such as HIV/AIDS, moral philosophy, climate change, peace education and gender are prominent in the curricular content at various levels. This is also in line with changes in science and technology, to

ensure curriculum sensitivity from regional and international issues such as gender, disability and globalization (Alade, 2011). Presently, this reform has led to the 6-year primary and 3-year junior secondary school levels now connected to form a 9-year continuous uninterrupted basic education level. This is already an approved policy of the government (Obioma, 2011). It was also stated that Government has approved the reduction of the content overload through a process of subject restructuring. According to Obioma, Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) restructured the curriculum with the following features: Core subjects become English Studies, Mathematics, Basic Science and Technology, Social Studies, Civic Education, Cultural and Creative Arts, Health and Physical Education, One Major Nigerian Language, Religious Studies (Christian/Islamic) and Computer Studies/ICT. Elective subjects include Arabic, Agriculture, and Home Economics, Introduction of French in primary 4 as a core subject

The separation of Basic Science and Basic Technology in JSS1, The introduction of Vocational Subjects in JSS1, The inclusion of Business Studies, Economics as electives in JSS1; The infusion of creative and critical thinking, entrepreneurship skills and relevant elements of the new vision (NV) 20-2020 goals, positive values, peace studies and entrepreneurial skills in the various contents. All these restructuring are geared towards job creation for youths.

At the post basic education, the Senior Secondary Education Curriculum (SSEC) is geared towards preparing students for higher education as well as laying a solid foundation for sustainable poverty eradication, job creation, wealth generation and value re-orientation which are the four focal points of National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) (Adesulu, 2013). According to Obioma, this constitutes the 3-year senior secondary school (SSS) and is geared towards preparing learners for productive work as well as for higher education as in the NEEDS context. To this effect, the following curriculum structural reform was adopted. The new SSEC represents not only global best practice per excellence but also a major paradigm shift from the obsolete content standards and knowledge matter to practical content. This curriculum is structured to enable it attain the four focal areas of NEEDS, support knowledge economy as well as create an enabling environment for youth empowerment and acquisition of functional skills and entrepreneurship (Adesulu, 2013). The core curriculum of the SSS was broadened and vocationalised.

The study of Basic Technology at the JSS level forms the basis for the further development and study of the subject at the SSS level. The infusion of entrepreneurial work skills in the relevant curriculum content, as well as making Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) core and compulsory is to ensure the production of graduates who can create their own jobs and wealth in fulfillment of the NEEDS ten-nets. This according to Obioma, will ensure the growing of a strong economy and technological education.

The new SSEC is structured as follows: There are five compulsory subjects which include English Language, General Mathematics, one trade/entrepreneurship subject which is to be selected from the list of 35 trade entrepreneurship subjects, Computer Studies/ICT and Civic Education which all students must offer. Then there are four distinct fields of studies/ specialization from which students are to offer three or four subjects. Under Science and Mathematics are Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Further Mathematics, Agriculture, Physical Education and Health Education. For the field of Business Studies are Accounting, Store Management, Office Practice, Insurance, Economics and Commerce. Subjects listed under Humanities include Nigerian Languages, Literature In English, Geography, Government, Christian Religious Studies, Islamic Studies, History, Visual Art, Music, French, Arabic and Economics while the field of Technology has Technical Drawing, General Metal Work, Basic Electricity, Electronics, Auto Mechanics, Building Construction, Wood -Work, Home Management, Foods & Nutrition And Clothing and Textiles (Adesulu, 2013). One elective subject may be offered by students within or outside their field of specialization provided the total number of subjects is not more than nine and not less than eight.

The 35 Trade subjects include; auto body repair and spray painting; auto electrical work; auto mechanical work; auto parts merchandising; air conditioning/ refrigerator; welding and fabrication/ engineering craft practice; electrical installation and maintenance work; radio, TV and electrical work; block laying, brick laying and concrete work; painting and decoration; plumbing and pipe fitting; machine wood working; carpentry and joinery; furniture making; upholstery and

catering craft practice. Others are garment making ; textile trade; book keeping; tourism; GSM maintenance; mining; photography; animal husbandry; fisheries; marketing; salesmanship; keyboarding; data procession; shorthand; cosmetology; printing and practice; dyeing and bleaching and leather goods manufacturing and repair. Although every secondary school must offer students opportunity to acquire some trade/entrepreneurship skills, the type of trade being made available for learning in schools will depend on equipment and resources available, the need of the community where the school is located as well as the vision of the school. According to Adesulu, the 35 trade/entrepreneurship subjects are new additions and enrichment to the SSEC.

By implication in the new structure, every learner is expected to be engaged with trade skills that will engender his/her global competitiveness. English is for strategic communication whereas Mathematics is to strengthen numeracy and general mathematical skills. The human capital that grows out of the focused area of potential specialization is the strength of the new SSEC structure. It is believed that by June 2014, graduates from the new SSEC are expected to possess relevant ICT skills and enterprise culture and become well prepared for their world of work or for higher education as may be applicable (Adesulu, 2013). This is a critical success factor in the actualization of Nigeria's Vision 20:2020 which is the mass production of people with requisite vocational and technical skills competencies in order to operate maintain and sustain the nation's economic activities for rapid socio-economic development.

Charles (2009) believe that the curriculum of the future will need to focus on the evolving 'capabilities' needed by learners if they are to develop employability skills, live enriched lives and participate actively in democratic life. A future-oriented curriculum would focus on 'learning for understanding' and require a move away from 'assessment careers' towards 'learning careers' (Ecclestone& Pryor, 2003 as cited in Charles, 2009). This implies a paradigm shift from traditional content based curriculum to integrated skill based curriculum. In this model the identification of explicit core and cross-curricular themes becomes an important strategy in reducing fragmentation and promoting higher levels of integration. Skill-oriented curriculum in the Nigerian classroom learning environment is all about entrepreneurship studies which will focus on employment and wealth generation(Okoye, Mokobia, &Atomatofa, 2013).

Skill oriented curriculum as is what Nigerian education of the 21st century should aspire for just as seen in countries like Japan and Asian Tigers (Okoye, Mokobia, &Atomatofa, 2013). A survey of 117 science teachers, results indicate that adequate implementation of a well-articulated skill-oriented curriculum could provide solution to the problem of poverty in Nigeria because the youths would have been taught some skills that could be used to create jobs for themselves. However, results revealed that there were not enough skill acquisition centres; not enough avenues and opportunities for training and not enough production activities to equip both teachers and youths for self-employment (Okoye, Mokobia, &Atomatofa, 2013).

In view of the curriculum structural reform, this has implications on the dwindling unemployment among youths which has invariably affected peace and vital developments in Nigeria.

### **Implications to Peace and Development**

It is believed by Unegbu (2011), that at least 71% of Nigerian youths are unemployed which is particularly disturbing and counterproductive to the nation. Viewing this from the perceptive of the recent events in the Middle East, Spain, Greece and UK where unemployment and poverty among others played a key role in the uprising, one can only conclude that Nigeria's unemployment poses a threat to its development, security and peaceful coexistence. It is therefore not out of place to consider massive employment generation as an issue of a major focus on national development and economic growth plan of the Nigerian government. Nigerian curriculum has actually transformed from knowledge base to practical or activity base yet an outcry that curriculum is still held accountable for the high unemployment among youths in Nigeria still persists.

Okoye, Mokobia, and Atomatofa (2013) contends that Mass unemployment among school leavers, leading to poverty as well as acute industrial backwardness are the results of the deficient curriculum which has made the nation to be complacent as a consumer one instead of learning to produce what its citizens and others need. Nigeria has a great curriculum structure right from the

primary school level to the tertiary level but management and implementations seems to be a big stumbling block towards the realization of the set objectives. When systems fail, the knowledge sector is always blamed without going deep into other intricacies.

### **Way forward to unemploymentcrises among youths in Nigeria.**

- In order to avoid the looming crises that will affect everyone, the demands of labour market ought to be considered in admission of students into certain programmes especially in higher institutions. This would be regarded as situation analysis of the society in respect to this problem.
- The implementation of the National Industrial Skills Development Programme (NISDP) that is expected to produce 29,875 readily employable graduates annually should be put in place to reduce unemployment as well as enhance national security (Aganga, 2013, March 4).
- The Industrial Training Fund (ITF), structures should be encouraged properly to empower graduates to be either gainfully employed or able to set up their own businesses. Thirty seven industrial skills training centers across the country has been established according to Aganga. These training would be in specific training centers for manufacturing, agro-allied, construction and other critical sectors of the economy. Jobs creation by private sector establishments could help unemployed graduates get something doing instead of wandering hopelessly for government work, and this effort would help to reduce crime in the society.
- One of the strategies adopted in Nigeria to facilitate employment and wealth generation is the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) and States Economic Empowerment Investment Schemes (SEEDS), others include Small and Medium Industries and Equity Scheme (SMIEIS), the National Poverty Alleviation Programmes (NAPEP) etc.
- Some researchers suggested a paradigm shift towards skill-oriented curriculumbased on change and innovation(Alade, 2011;Eze, 2010; Okoye, Mokobia,&Atomatofa 2013). This must be consistent with the policy formulation and sincere pursuance of its objectives through the curriculum implementation at all levels of education in Nigeria. This urgent need is necessary for a paradigm shiftfrom theoretical teaching and literary application to apractical application of knowledge necessary for skill development in order to keep pace with modern trends on curriculum issues and educational reforms worldwide. It is believed that teachers should be prepared to take students on field trips to different sites that are relevant to their future career.
- Development of trade/entrepreneurship subjects from where students are to choose at least one trade for compulsory study would support the creation of jobs after graduation.

### **Conclusion**

Unemployment has become a cankerworm eating deep among youths in Nigeria. When a system is failing it is usually attributed to the curriculum structure in the country which invariably has led to restructuring and reforming of the curriculum in Nigeria for decades now. Despite these changes and reforms, the situation has remained critical and alarming in the whole world and Nigeria in particular. This problem has been attributedto poor curriculum structure and implementation, poor policy and attitude of employers of labour. This has great implication to economic development, peace and security in Nigeria. There is however, a need for paradigm shift in curriculum implementation and policy formulation in Nigeria.

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