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## UNEMPLOYMENT CHALLENGE IN NIGERIA: VOCATIONAL EDUCATION THROUGH OPEN & DISTANCE LEARNING MODEL TO THE RESCUE

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### Abstract

*The paper reviewed the present status of unemployment situation in Nigeria with emphasis on university graduates. Effort was also made to examine the role vocational education through Open Distance Learning (ODL) can play to address this national problem. Included is recommendation of a vocational training programme developed for graduates seeking employment in areas as Fashion, Interior Decoration, Leather works, Accessories etc. The importance of this ODL based model of vocational education and training programme has great importance and relevance in countries where unemployment is a serious challenge and where there is a great need of providing training to multitude of unemployed youths at different levels to enable them have skills that will afford them the opportunity to contribute their quota to the economic advancement of their country.*

**Keywords:** Unemployment, Vocational Education, Open Distance Learning, University graduates

### Introduction

Unemployment has become a plague avaging most countries of the world and there seems to be no end in sight despite the various programmes and policies put in place by concerned governments and other stakeholders. Nigeria, with half the population of West Africa and a vast spread of natural and human resource endowment, has the potential to be the source of growth and prosperity for the region if not for Africa as a whole. This unemployment problem as maintained a steady rise over the years. Nigeria's current economic under-performance is erratic and short of expectations, such that 66% of Nigeria's citizens, educated youths especially, live below the international poverty line, at just \$1.00 a day or \$300.00 a year (Omotosho, 2009). This is an indication that the Nigeria over the years has gradually disintegrated from its highly buoyant and respected position among developing nations of the south (Obumneke, 2012). It is pertinent to note that this problem has not always been an issue to educated Nigerians especially those schooled in the 60's and 70's. Various records (Ipaye, 1998; ISHR, 2006) show clearly that in the two preceding decades of the independence of Nigeria as a sovereign nation (1960s, 1970s), unemployment and its attendant consequence of social and economic deprivation were not of national concern as they are today. The Commission on the Review of Higher Education popularly called "Longe Commission" (1992) reported that by 1984, the phenomenon of graduate unemployment had begun to emerge and was generally believed to be due to the lopsided production of high level manpower from the universities.

In the past, when the nation's agricultural industrial sector was given top priority, it generated about 70% of the nation's employment opportunities and accounted for about 8% of the Gross Domestic Product (ISHR, 2006). The economy was further strengthened when the nation experienced oil boom in the mid 70s, as it grew at an

average of over 11% in revenue. Nevertheless, the inability of successive government to manage the windfall from petrol income and the ensuring political instability of military intervention and inconsistencies in the socio-economic and educational policies of successive governments, contributed to the emergence of the present state of unemployment in Nigeria.

Nigeria is economically under-productive, relative to its potential for significant development (Omosho, 2009). From the mid 90's, the employment opportunities in Nigeria has been declining though the economy was still much better compared to the present situation where the country is battling with economic recession as a result of dwindling revenue from the main source of income-petrol. A fall out of the recession is the critical unemployment challenges facing the teeming population-most especially the youths of the country. Every year, youths in their millions are turned into the labour market with no corresponding demand for their skill and services. As far back as year 2000, Anameza affirmed that Nigeria will have no prospect of measurable development or of improving the welfare of its people; unless it enhances the chances of employment for its graduates. According to World Bank Report (1993), enhanced employment and productivity have been central to the brilliant performance of the so-called "Asian Tigers" in Japan. The implication of this assertion is that Nigeria's developmental goal of vision 2020 will be a dream without the creation of employment opportunities for its population.

According to National Bureau of Statistics (2017), unemployment rate in Nigeria rose from 13.9% in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter to 14.2% in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2016. The bureau asserted that in keeping with the recent trend in the labour market, unemployment and underemployment continued to be highest for persons aged between ages 15 to 34. Further breakdown revealed that unemployment rate was highest for those within the ages of 15-24; and for this group, unemployment actually increased to 36.5% in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2016.

It's the ninth consecutive quarter that the unemployment rate in Nigeria has increased. Statistics of Nigerian unemployment seems to consist, not only of uneducated, rural populations, who have been uprooted by failing agricultural production resulting from the absence of mechanisation and decreasing incomes but also of some highly educated populations, as well, who normally, would form the core of the productive vanguard in a developing country. In other words, many of Nigeria's unemployed and consequently poor are well educated even by European and American standards (Obumneke, 2012).

Overall, unemployment in Nigeria has affected youths from a broad spectrum of socioeconomic groups, both the well and less educated, although it has particularly stricken a substantial fraction of youths from low income backgrounds and limited education. From the foregoing, it is obvious that unemployment, especially the unemployment of graduates, impedes Nigeria's progress in many ways. Apart from economic waste, it also constitutes danger for high incidence of crimes such as armed robbery, kidnapping, cultism, terrorism, prostitution, drug peddling and other social vices (Sodipo, 2014). Not only is it disturbing to note that Nigeria's graduates have limited chances of becoming gainfully employed, it is even more disheartening that the country's economic condition is such that, it is hardly able to absorb an optimal proportion of the production of its own educational system. Gone were the days when

employers go about looking for employees. It is now the turn of employees to move from one office to the other seeking non-existent jobs. These days thousands of young people are found waiting to be interviewed for just one, two or few vacant positions in some organisations or firms. Most people who cannot earn their living are prone to social vices such as engagement in criminal activities such as kidnapping, ritual killing, arm robbery and socially delinquent behaviour. The state of unemployment can even lead to depression, low self-esteem, frustration and a number of other negative consequences (Ipaye, 1998). Youth employment is a crucial issue in Nigeria because the youth constitute a major part of the labour force and they have innovative ideas, which among other factors are important in the development process of the country. A large proportion of these youths however are unemployed. The negative consequences include psychological problems of frustration, depression, hostility and gradual drift of some visible unemployed youths into all manner of criminal behaviour (Okafor, 2011). The menace of unemployment has increasingly been recognized as one of the socio-economic problems currently facing many developing countries like Nigeria and Africa as a whole.

### **Why Unemployment problem in Nigeria?**

A number of reasons have been adduced for the proliferation of high incidence of unemployment among the youths in the country. Some among them are: economic mismanagement, endemic corruption, lack of infrastructure, unrealistic education system that has failed to move with the tide of time etc. Of major concern to this paper is the unrealistic educational curriculum that is not incorporating vocational skill training into the school programme.

### **Issues in Vocational Education**

The neglect of technical and vocational education in Nigeria and a value for liberal education over the years have culminated in a serious unemployment challenges and lack of technological growth, hence, our over dependent on foreign goods and services. Yet it is only in technical and vocational education that lies the economic strength for technological development and national prosperity.

The neglect of vocational education is rubbing the nation of the contribution their graduates would make on the economy- establishing small- scale businesses and employing youths that roam the streets. It is, therefore, socially injurious to neglect this important area or look down on its graduates. The society needs competent auto mechanics and truck drivers, carpenters, plumbers, electricians, web and network technicians, bookkeepers, and clerks, medical technicians and nursing assistants (and other personnel in this category) to function well. Right now, a host of these skills are in short supply in Nigeria. The half- baked roadside mechanics in the society often leave the vehicles in worse condition than when it was given out to them. It is on record that a number of Nigerians have been sent to their untimely death in the hands of poorly trained drivers, nurses' assistants and auto mechanics to mention a few. With all these, it is a great disservice to the society to neglect vocational education. The current preoccupation with university education is counterproductive, as not everyone needs a university education. It also reduces economic opportunities for students who are more oriented toward hands-on-training than academic rigour. The neglect of technical and vocational education may have contributed in no small way

to the high unemployment and rising poverty been experienced by the youths in Nigeria because most of them lack the skills that they can sell to make money. Rather, they are engaged in the struggle to acquire more academic and professional certificates.

Obviously, investment in skill acquisition and vocational education is a worthwhile venture that pays the society back in multiple of ways. The graduates would become small business owners and employers of labour; this can then be compared to other industrialised countries where small businesses are the highest employers of labour. This reality is buttressed in the words of Oluwadare, Adebayo and Adekunle (2016) that affirmed that business education and entrepreneurship training is one of the major ways to adopt in combating the turbulent graduate unemployment in order to inculcate employability and self-reliant skills in the youths and possibly take Nigeria out of its present economic challenges. However, the Federal government has commenced in earnest a rescue mission to change the mind-set for self-destruction through its apparent abject neglect or disdain for technical and vocational education by the introduction of *The New Secondary Education Curricula: Trade/ Entrepreneurship*. This curriculum introduced 35 trade/entrepreneurship programmes and each school is expected to pick from these courses as it may relate to its vision. Furthermore, every student must offer (learn) at least one trade/entrepreneurship subject.

### **Definitions of Vocational Education**

Technical and Vocational Education and training (TVET) have been recognized the world over as tools for empowering people, especially the youth, for sustainable livelihood and social-economic development. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) recommendations of 2000 on technical and vocational education and training for the twenty-first century, defined TVET as those aspects of education process involving, in addition, to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life. TVET is further understood to be:

An integral part of general education;

A means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work;

An aspect of lifelong learning and a preparation for responsible citizenship;

An instrument for promoting environmentally sound suitable development

A method of alleviating poverty

The overriding goals of TVET in Nigeria are to:

Provide trained manpower in the applied sciences, technology and business particularly at craft, advanced craft and technical levels;

Provide the technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, commercial and economic development;

Give training and impart necessary skills to individual who shall be self reliant economically.

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The development of technical and vocational skills is vital to economic development for two important reasons. First, technical and vocational skills are needed for enterprise productivity and profitability, as well as for national productivity and wealth creation. Without the necessary technical skills, enterprise and national growth can be seriously affected. Technological innovation and economic growth fuel the demand for skilled workers. The need for technical and vocational skills is increasing because of a convergence of factors—technological change, changes in work organization, growing economic openness and competitiveness, and capital deepening (increasing capital per worker). The second reason development of technical and vocational skills is of vital importance is because it is essential for individual prosperity. Skills enable the individual to increase productivity and income. This is especially important for those who are seeking out a living in the informal sector of the economy.

Today in Nigeria, population growth and urbanization; poverty and lack of income generating capacity and failure of graduates from schools system to secure employment clearly highlights the importance of career development which is achievable through TVET. To enable those still in post- secondary schools to be relevant to the world of work as well as to draw the majority of jobless people out of the unemployment market, there is need to reposition TVET as the best means to improve economic opportunities for the teaming youths which will eventually enhance economic development.

### **Role of Open and Distance Learning in Vocational Education**

Jegede (2003) define Open and Distance Learning (ODL) as a way of providing learning opportunities that is characterized by the separation of teacher and learner in time or place, or both time and place. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) is increasingly becoming popular because of its flexibility and learner friendly approach, particularly to those who could not get access to the formal education system.

Distance education is more costs effective and can take place while continuing full-time employment (Moran and Rumble, 2004). People who live in remote areas find that ODL permits them to enroll in programmes, which otherwise would not be available to them. At present, the National Open University (NOUN) has seventy-seven (77) Study Centers spread across the country with a total population of about 254,000 (Economic Confidential, 2017). In collaboration with NUC, a number of Federal Universities such as university of Ibadan, university of Lagos are also offering ODL programmes for the benefit of Nigerians. Workplace learning is also expanding rapidly in organizations, boosted by online learning opportunities. Web-based training or E-training, an innovative approach to distance learning, can be effectively utilized for delivering knowledge to individuals anywhere in the country. If the developing countries want to enhance their international competitiveness for the well being of their people, they must address the concerns for vocational education and training. The path for economic development and prosperity through the skills training and ODL as the modality for vocational education and training allows vast number of people, hitherto unreached to take advantage of education and training opportunities (Ladipo & Adelana, 2014). The changing skills demands due to competition and rapid market changes, especially in Small and Medium Enterprises

(SMEs), calls for provision of continuous learning and training opportunities through Government, Non-government and Private Institutions. There is a need for a paradigm shift in the training approaches in the formal and informal sector for developing skills attuned to the needs of the society.

To buttress the importance of these sectors on creation of employment, the Nigerian government confirms that since 2011 to date, 98 percent of the 1.8 million jobs created each year are from small and medium enterprises (NBS, 2014). Provision of appropriate skills may thus be an important intervention to increasing the productivity of this workforce. This sector cannot approach the formal system of education for various reasons that ranges from finance, lack of ability to cope, time constraints, fear of loss of income etc. Here open and distance learning mode institution can play important role by providing flexible and cost effective vocational education. For example, the National Open University (NOUN) offering 70 different courses through 77 Study Centers recognized by National university commission (NOUN, 2017) can incorporate practical vocational training into its programme thereby giving numerous candidates an opportunity to empower themselves. Presently, NOUN runs basically the same curriculum the conventional universities run in terms of courses on offer. It will therefore be an innovation in Nigeria if it can introduce Batik Creative Art and Accessories making in its vocational programme since Open and Distance Learning (ODL) system is now recognized and accepted as an important mode for disseminating skill acquisition. In addition to contributing to social and economic development, ODL plays a decisive role in the creation of a knowledge-based society.

### **Batik Making Programme**

Batik is a prominent art form in Nigeria culture despite its origins outside of West Africa. There is no precise agreement on the exact site where batik originated, and there is even some speculation that the method of fabric dying commenced in multiple locations independently. However, despite some debate on how and where batik emerged, organizations like Batik Guild (2011) believes that Indonesia should be accredited for the development of batik because historically it was “the area where batik reached the greatest peak of accomplishment. As for Nigeria, there has been a long history of “resist dyeing using cassava and rice paste” (Batik Guild, 2011) in a process comparable to batik.

Batik products as a sector has been given considerable attention by some state such as Ogun and Osun government in Nigeria at various levels due to the inherent strength and features which are popular to Nigeria. This is due largely to the fact that this industry cuts across various other sectors with far reaching implication for employment generation and high revenue potential for both the individual and the government. Batik and textile design as a skill oriented course helps to equip individuals with saleable skills needed for self-reliance. Batik making and textile design equip individuals for enormous employment opportunities in occupations relating to clothing and textile namely: Dress making/clothing construction, Designing, Interior Decoration, Dry cleaning and laundering, Beauty care and hairdressing, Fashion merchandising, pattern illustration, Household goods, Car Interior, Soft Toys making, and Modeling etc.

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There exists a large raw materials base in terms of cotton production considering the recent effort of the government to boost cotton production in an industry that recorded an annual growth of 67% between 1985 to 1991; and as at 1991, it employed about 25% of workers in the manufacturing sector (Bangar, 2005). Apart from this, cotton production on its own has tremendous potential for employment generation. Its potential for employment generation among weaker sections of the society and women is immense.

However, despite being a traditional industry peculiar to western Nigeria and reasonably good potential on the export front, the Nigerian batik industry is yet to take its place in the international market, therefore the need for a larger share of the global market exists.

The Batik Industry which developed as a traditional crafts is at present under the process of transformation into a technology based vibrant export oriented industry. Besides its eminent position in the country's economy as a foreign exchange earner, the batik industries also significantly contribute to employment generation by providing employment to a larger number of people, majority of who are from rural community and weaker sections of the society.

### **Features of Nigerian Textile (Batik) Industry**

Nigeria, Africa's largest economy, once had a booming textile industry which has its golden era between 1985 and 1991. During this period, the Nigerian batik was well sought after by foreigners who come visiting the country. As a distinctive textile type, *adire* first emerged in the city of Abeokuta, a center for cotton production, weaving, and indigo-dyeing in the nineteenth century. The prototype was tie-dyed "kijipa", a hand-woven cloth dyed with indigo for use as wrappers and covering cloths. Female specialists dyed yarns and cloth and also refurbished faded clothing by re-dyeing the cloth with tie-dyed patterns. When British trading firms introduced cheap imported cloth and flooded the market with colorful inexpensive printed textiles, the *adire* industry emerged to meet the challenge. The women discovered that the imported white cotton shirting was cheaper than handwoven cloth and could be decorated and dyed to meet local tastes. The soft, smooth texture of the imported cloth, in contrast to the rough surface of "kijipa" cloth, provided a new impetus for decoration. The soft shirting encouraged the decorators to create smaller more precise patterns with tie-dye methods and to use raffia thread to produce finely patterned stitch-resist *adire-alabere*. The smooth surface of shirting led to the development of hand-painted starch-resist *adire-eleko* (Batik). Abeokuta remained the major producer and trade center for *adire*, but Ibadan, a larger city to the north, developed a nucleus of women artists who specialized in hand-painted *adire eleko*.

The wrapper design Ibadan *dun* ("Ibadan *dun*" meaning "the city of Ibadan is sweet") is popular to this day.

Below are some features of Nigerian Textile Industry:

- The Batik Industry is a significant segment of the Fashion Industry in Nigeria.

- Nigerian batik is well renowned for its intricacy and design and it is considered among the best that can compete favorably well in international community.
- The industry is labour intensive and is concentrated in the small and cottage industry sectors.
- The major production centers in Nigeria are Abeokuta, Oshogbo, and Ibadan.
- Nigeria in itself has a huge domestic market, which is largely untapped.
- The Nigerian Batik industry lack institutional infrastructural support from the government.
- The availability of abundant raw material base, large domestic market and the opportunity to cater to world markets makes Nigeria an attractive destination for technology and investments opportunities.

In other countries that know the importance of vocational education, ODL has been adopted as a means of disseminating this training to members of the public.

These certificate programmes can be designed to provide the know-how and skills needed to work as a worker, supervisor and entrepreneur in Batik and related Industries. It will train the students to provide effective and efficient services in the fashion, toy, and interior decoration sector. It is a highly skill oriented programme and involves intensive practical work.

### **Goal of the Programme**

Introduction of Modern technique in batik making

Up gradation of Educational Qualification of Learners.

Opportunities for training in Entrepreneurship module.

Promoting the educational well-being of the community.

Offering need based academic programmes.

Employment related continuing education programmes that will enhance economic advantages of the learners.

This programme can be taken by those who are already employed (directly or indirectly in the Fashion Industry) unemployed youths, retrenched workers or those considering career change.

### **Programme Delivery**

Like other programmes of National Open University (NOUN), the programme under investigation also follows a multimedia approach in instruction. It comprises: self-learning material, supporting audio/video programmes, teleconferencing, counseling sessions, seminar-based and workshop-based activities and added feature of Personal Contact Programme (PCP) to meet specific learner needs. PCPs will be conducted at existing vocational centers affiliated to NOUN. Participation of learners in the personal contact programme is compulsory. Teleconferencing will also be adopted to provide greater clarity and understanding to the learners.

### **Conclusions**

On the strength of the discourse and information provided in this paper, it is obvious that the role of Distance Education is very significant for the socio-economic development of the country. Right now, Open Distance Education can no longer be



considered as a supplementary form of education. It is therefore expected that continued research on open distance learning and its challenges will be undertaken in order to motivate open distance learning universities to improve on their teaching infrastructure, online communication, learning materials, assessment mechanism and feedbacks.

This paper expects that in the foreseeable future, ODL will become a catalyst for vocational and entrepreneurship development in Nigeria. In the light of this, there is the need for policy review and political will on the part of the government to ensure that ODL become a catalyst for skill and entrepreneurship development by partnering with relevant vocational institutes. The most crucial of such policy review is the need to change the mindset of learners in Nigeria from white-collar oriented job seekers to job creators. On a final note, the policy-makers should improve the financial and technological capacities of universities and National Open University that offer effective and efficient ODL courses in order for them to provide quality education, skills and vocational training for students running such programmes in Nigeria.

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