

THE CHALLENGES OF NIGERIAN POLYTECHNIC EDUCATION GRADUATES EMPLOYABILITY. THE WAY FORWARD

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ABSTRACT

This study empirically evaluate the challenges of Nigerian Polytechnic Graduates Employability with respect to the yearning gap between Higher Education graduates profile and the prevailing challenges of the labour market. However, against the backdrop of the problem of unemployment, this paper set out to examine the problems of polytechnic education, identifying polytechnic education as an aspect of technical education, which in its generic sense is offered at three major levels, namely the high, the middle and low level manpower. The paper highlighted the percentage rate of unemployment from 2010 to 2019 and used the figures of the percentage rate of unemployment to draw bar chart, the result shows that the unemployment rate was stable from 2012 to 2015 which was at the rate of 28.57, it depreciated in 2016 and began to rise again from 2016 to 2019 as a result of changes in macro economic policy in Nigeria. The paper therefore suggested for the introduction of mentorship education in federal polytechnic education curriculum in order to bridge up the gap between Nigerian polytechnic graduates and their counterparts in the global market.

Key words: - *Polytechnic Education, Mentoring, Unemployment, Employability, Problems.*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of Education has been defined in various ways by different authorities. BBC English Dictionary (1999) defines it as the process through which a person is taught better ways of doing something or a better way of living, “while Obasi and Erondu (2003) define it as the process by which an individual acquires or imparts knowledge, facts, skills, experiences, abilities and attitudes necessary for an active and useful life in the society.

Education has been generally acknowledged as the key that unlocks the gate to the social, economic, political and technological development of any society. But in Nigeria, the scary unemployment situation has necessitated the need to identify an approach to education that would guide and equip polytechnic students with the basic knowledge, skills and competencies needed to be employable or be self-employed.

In the process of education, one encounters so many people who play significant roles in the process and who may have in one way or the other contributed meaningfully to the positive impact in their career. These people can as well be referred to as mentors. A mentor can be a parent, guidance, friends, relatives, teachers, supervisor, as the case may be.

In industrial age, mentoring focuses on career advancement within an organizational hierarchy (Haney & Nwaokwa, 2014). Now the new information age demands a wide range of cognitive interpersonal and technical skills.

According to Ituen (2004) teachers in a school should adopt a macro approach involving learners, with a limited time of 40 minutes per period or an hour as the case may be. So mentoring strengthens whatever knowledge, skills, values, competencies one comes into in an organization or polytechnic education so as to have a good and smooth transition in the workforce and professional growth.

THE CONCEPT OF POLYTECHNIC EDUCATION AS TECHNICAL EDUCATION

Technical Education has been defined as the instruction in a skill or procedure, usually of a mechanical type, and at a level between that of the professional scientist or engineer and that of a skilled craft person (Ofori – Bruku, 2005). UNESCO & ILO (2002) defined it 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.

Technical Education is a veritable means of producing the various levels and kinds of manpower required for the industrial, economic and social development of a nation. No economy or nation will thrive without the services of engineers, architects, planners, teachers, business managers, scientists and other professions of high, middle and lower cadres.

Howlett (2005) identifies the various levels of technical manpower that make up the industrial team and elements of their training as illustrated in table 1 below.

Table 1: Defining the Industrial Team from Craft Person to Scientist

Technical Manpower	Duties	% Theory	% Practical	Academic Qualification
Scientist	Searches for and generate new knowledge	90	10	M.Sc PhD
Engineer	Designs and create hardware and software for new knowledge and ideas system developer	70	30	B.Sc, M.Sc or M.Tech
Technologist	Makes design prototypes, suggest redesign or modification, act as system dev. engineer.	60	40	HND or B.Tech
Technician	Makes model or prototypes, suggest redesign or modification, act as system dev. engineer	50	50	Technician Part III
Craft Person	Produces part from complete designs, install and runs hardware	20	80	Technician/Vocational School Certificate plus on the job training.

Source Howleth, D. (2005) from Pond, R.J. (1999) Introduction to Engineering Technology Prentice Hall, INC, Revised by Afeti, G.M.

The powerful nations of the world owe their industries supremacy, militating prowess, technological superiority and economic might to Education in general and technical education in particular.

Generally, technical education, in its generic sense, is offered at three major levels, namely the high, the middle and low. Statutorily, universities are responsible for the general of high level manpower, the polytechnics for middle level manpower and technical/vocational school for low level manpower. But the realities of today reveals that polytechnic now also produces middle level manpower, while universities also produces middle level manpower in certain disciplines. Polytechnic education in Nigeria is said to have begun with the establishment of Yaba College of Technology 1948, and subsequently followed by others. Today, we have many federal, state and private polytechnic in Nigeria as shown in Table II below.

Ownership	Number of Polytechnics
Federal	27
State	49
Private	44
Total	120

Source Educeleb.com (2018)

Until recently, ownership and running of polytechnics were under the monopoly of the federal and state governments. But recently government had allowed private participations and running of polytechnic education which had brought the desired competitiveness that drives the increase in manpower especially the middle level cadre to contain the industrial dynamics. The competition had encouraged polytechnics to organize conference, seminars and study groups relative to the fields of learning specified in paragraph (a) of the subsection (Federal Polytechnic Act 1979 No. 33).

THE CONCEPT OF MENTORING

In this paper, mentoring is defined as a support relationship between an individual who is more experience known as the (mentor) and another individual who is less experience known as the (mentee) with the sole aim of providing guidance to the mentee in a bid to foster the mentees personal and career development and consequently improve the mentors wealth of experience. Mentoring is seen as a support from the peer or colleagues, line manager, councilors, teachers, work teams, friend and parents. Chukwumezie (2012) defined mentoring as process of using specially selected and trained people to provide guidance which will help to develop the career of that individual allocated to them. Tucker (2007) define mentoring as a supportive and learning relationship between an individual and the mentor (teacher) who shares his or her knowledge, experience and insights with another less experience person the mentee (learner), the learning associate, who is willing and ready to benefit from this exchange.

To Schlee (2000), mentoring involves putting yourself into multiple roles to improve a younger person's life. Whether helping someone to cope with difficult situation, survive school or achieve a personal goal.

According to Riverine (2007) mentoring is regarded as one of the most effective ways and supervising and structuring students in every sphere of life, in other words, mentoring helps to break the barrier of inaccessibility which most students experience, thereby, preventing them from losing hope, making hasty and poor decisions, while enabling them to develop their potentials and gain self confidence.

ROLES OF MENTORING ON STUDENTS DEVELOPMENT

Mentoring plays an important role in both students and professional development. Mentoring has a long-standing tradition in many professions such as medicine, business organizations and other professions. Nwabueze & Ozioko

(2012), observed that no institution can exist without older and more experience members passing on wisdom acquired over the year to the new members. Fenny (2007) defined mentoring as a process for the informal transmission of knowledge, social capital and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career or professional development.

TYPES OF MENTORING

- (i) Traditional Face-to-Face: - Mentoring is one on one and face-to-face communication between a mentor and a mentee who requires guidance and assistance.
- (ii) E-Mentoring: - E-mentoring use email and smart technologies such as online or web based video link.
- (iii) Group Mentoring: - This is the coming together of experience mentors with multiple mentees within a given organization to pass bulk of experience from mentors to mentees.

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THE CONCEPT OF UNEMPLOYMENT

Economically speaking, the population of every economy is divided into two, the economically inactive people. Our major concern here is the economically active people also known as the labour force. The labour force refers to the population of people that is willing and able to work, including those actively engage in the production of goods and services and those who are unemployed. Unemployment are those who are capable and willing to work but are unable to find sustainable paid employment. Unemployment is high in Nigeria as a result of bad economic policy, such as Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAP). It was then observed that the philosophy of self-reliance such as creating a new cultural and productive environment that would promote pride in primitive work and self discipline was lacking in tertiary institutions. Nwagwu (2007) opines that the failure of tertiary education to inculcate the above philosophy in students has led to the wastages in both human and natural resources. This is because graduate from tertiary institutions are not equipped with enough skills to exploit the natural resource that abound in Nigeria.

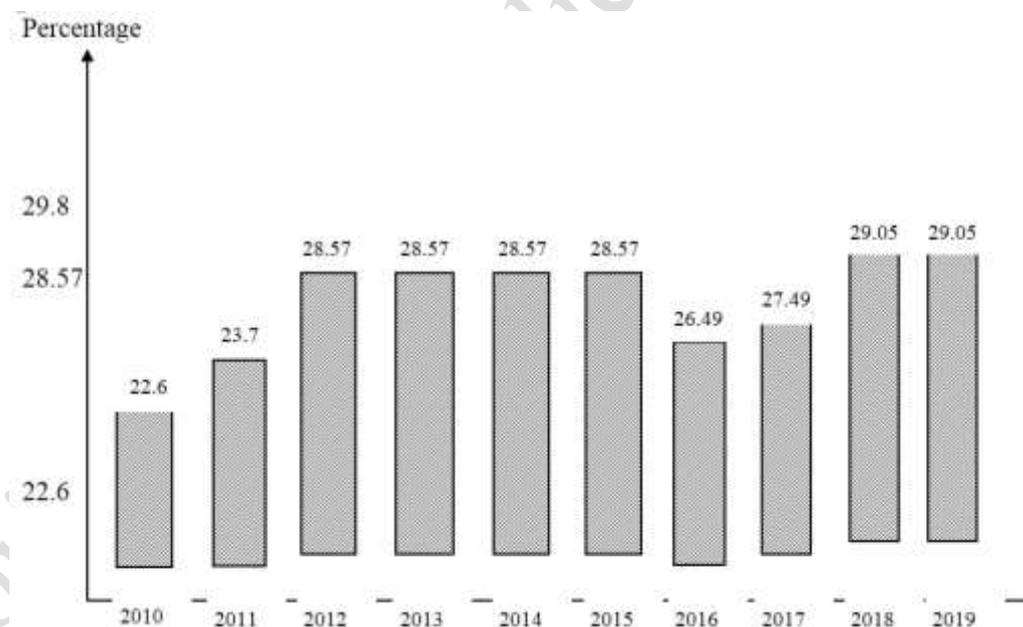
The 2010 Global Monitoring Report (GMR) of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), reveal that about 92 percent of Nigeria population survives on less than 1 dollar daily. This can be measured by the proportion of labour force who have no placement. Nigerian Economic Fact Sheet release by United States Embassy in Nigeria (2012) released the unemployment statistics in Nigeria as follows.

Table III: Percentage of Unemployment Rate in Nigeria from 2010 – 2019

Year	Percentage Rate
2010	22.6
2011	23.7
2012	28.57
2013	28.57
2014	28.57
2015	28.57
2016	26.69
2017	27.49
2018	29.07
2019	29.08

Source: Nigerian Economic Fact Sheet (2019)

From available statistics, over 60 million Nigerians are available for job and about 48 million are working that is why the federal government of Nigeria accepted World Bank (2013) unemploy rate at 28.57% for Nigeria



From table III and the figure above, unemployment rate from 2012 to 2015 were stable as a result of changes in economic policy to curb out unemployment, it declined further in 2016, and began to rise up again as a result of increase in tertiary institution in Nigeria which graduate students on yearly basis and

stoppage of importation of goods that can be locally produced such as rice and sugar without corresponding job vacancies to absorb them. The polytechnic and technical students that supposed to be trained to be self-reliance and creator of jobs, are also searching for white collar jobs. Meanwhile, 64% of Nigerian graduates needs additional trainings to fit into require jobs, at this juncture, the mentorship education should stand as link between the polytechnic students and the realities of the labour market.

THE CONCEPT OF POLYTECHNIC GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

Apart from trying to hazard a definition to the concept polytechnic graduate employability, the question that probably comes to the minds is “are polytechnic graduates employable? Trying to the proffer an answer to this question, let us give the term Employability the simplest definition.

Employability refers to the competence of graduates to fit into the requirement or job specification and compete favourably in the global market. Igwe (2015) employable graduates must not be people within limited scope of expansion in the field of knowledge, and they must prove beyond reasonable doubt that they can deliver at favourable work conditions.

Employability grade must have gone through series of trainings, possess mental, physical, confidence and capacity to deliver at favourable condition.

PROBLEMS OF POLYTECHNIC EDUCATION

Although they have increased in number, the polytechnics have not made the expected impact in the society. They have not mitigated the incidence of high rate of unemployment as expected. Rather they have continue to produce white collar job seeker, instead of job creator.

A Federal Ministry of Education document (2006) once noted this problem in a statement to the effect “in general, perception of technical and vocation education have been that it is an area for drop-outs and failure from other schools. Discrimination by government and private sector against the polytechnics and polytechnic in terms of finding. The relegation of polytechnic in terms of finding is the evident below. Table IV

Institutions	1999	2001	2002	2005
University	2,124,999,960.12	1,794,128,000.00	3,243,500,000.00	2,025,000,000.00
Polytechnic	1,087,209,288.00	967,500,000.00	1,642,500,000.00	1,667,500,000.00
College of Education	1,099,137,930.00	1,116,069,500.00	1,742,625,000.00	1,259,000,000.00

Source: NBS (2006) quoting ETF

(ii) Recruitment and placement of polytechnic product/graduates.

(iii) Condition of service for polytechnic staff as an evidence in the lower allowance.

(iv) With the evidence above, there will be no equipped classrooms to teach and prepare polytechnic students to be like their counterparts from the universities.

CONCLUSION

This paper began with an explanation of the concept of polytechnic education as technical education saddle with the responsibility of teaching and equipping students to be job creators instead of seekers of white collar jobs. It highlighted the objectives and function of polytechnics ranging from knowledge generation to manpower development. The paper explained the impact of mentorship as a link between the polytechnic students and the labour market realities, in a bid to foster personal and career development. The paper highlighted challenges of polytechnic which ranges from human, material and finance. Finally, the paper suggested for introduction at mentorship education in polytechnic curriculum to bridge up the gap between polytechnic students and labour markets realities.

RECOMMENDATION

National redefinition of the concept of polytechnic education with a review to charting untrammled career path for its graduates.

Adequate funding accompanied by scrupulous monitoring of funds made available to the institution to ensure that they are judiciously expended.

Mentorship education should be introduced in polytechnic curriculum, to stand as a link between the students and market realities.

Periodic curriculum review to tailor their programmes and courses to the dynamic of our local, national and international socio-economic environments.

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