

**Analysis of the Nigerian School System, Counseling and Labor Quality
and the Need for Paradigm Shift Towards Entrepreneurship.**

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Abstract

Statistics on Nigeria's resource use and employment have revealed a lack of ideal correlation between the school system and human capital generation which generally drives individual and national development and employment. In the labor market, a disproportionate number of Nigerian school graduates are deemed unemployable, particularly the organized private sector, due to, among others, lack of usable skills, right knowledge and attitudes. The seeming quality gap is usually linked to what some researchers identify as a faulty school system. This empirical research profiled the school system, counseling and state of unemployment in Nigeria. Utilizing the survey method, in-depth interviews and official records for understanding issues involved towards remediation and improving graduate skills and marketability. It observed inadequacy of vocational schools, counseling contents and weak institutional support capable of growing employable human capital with skills, knowledge and attitudes suitable for modernity. Among others, it recommended prioritization of vocational facilities with trained students counselors and adequate educational funding for employment generation.

Key words: vocation, students counseling, skills, employment and entrepreneurship.

Introduction

As a follow-up to initial socialization, individuals, particularly children and youths, receive various forms of education from the school system towards equipping themselves for future roles in society. Achieved statuses inevitably form the fulcrum for adapting to the modern world's functional institutional arrangements, without which, skill, attitudes and behavior patterns cannot be cultivated by individuals to compete in the professions and various callings. Analyzing the tertiary segment of education in Nigeria, Ozorji (2014) observes that universities have been criticized for graduating products who are not employable, whose skills and knowledge are below form and who cannot defend the certificates they carry.

The school system –cum labor quality outcome is naturally, labor productivity, particularly in non-monopolistic ventures where profit maximization and customer retention are key pillars of business. From economic perspective, Dokpesi (2015) observes that labor productivity in Nigeria has always been reported as being low due to low quality labor which some employers attribute to, among other factors, low quality education. Labor productivity is the amount of labor impute required to produce a unit of output. Nigeria's debased economy is viewed as the largest in Africa even as at 2017, yet, its labor quality has been revealed as being abysmally non-competitive with regard to other economies. Comparatively, Dokpesi (2015) observes labor productivity in Russia, Brazil and Turkey as being much higher than in Nigeria. In 2012, the following productivity rates were recorded: Turkey \$28.9/hour, Russia \$24/hour, Brazil \$10.7/hour, USA \$64.1/hour, Norway \$86.5/hour, UK \$48.5 and Nigeria \$3.5/hour. Thus, labor productivity seems to align with Ozorji (2014) as deriving from lack of quality education. These are difficulties identified over time by small and medium scale business owners in particular.

The World Bank Group (2016) report on Nigeria, in an in-depth analysis of its labor market, notes the diversity across its geographical areas, sectors and demographic groups. It examines Nigeria's complex labor market to explore how better jobs and income earning opportunities could form the basis for more diversified growth, more evenly distributed poverty reduction and social cohesion. The result points to a distinct polarization that will require accelerated structural re-arrangements to significantly increase productive employment opportunities. The report observes what it calls "business as usual" and a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth that is fostering the emergence of "two Nigerians", one in which high and diversified growth provides more jobs and income opportunities to a small share of the population, and one in which workers are trapped in low productivity and more traditional subsistence activities. This polarization was also observed geographically with the report revealing a divide between Northern Nigeria which has low levels of educational access and high youth unemployment, and Southern Nigeria, where jobs and income opportunities are concentrated. The report thus suggests a correlation between education as an independent variable and such concepts as youth unemployment, low productivity and income as dependent variables.

Very vital suggestions were made as reasons for the polarization and solution towards skill building and facilitation process for school products marketability: On education, Nigeria needs to improve basic skill levels and build better policies and programmes that would boost access and market relevance of technical and vocational education and training (World Bank, 2016). Low labor marketability is the driver of under-employment and unemployment where tertiary institution's graduates engage in jobs meant for high school products, with many of them teaching in primary schools and some working as shop attendants, security guards and some engage themselves as home tutors.

Under-employment and unemployment of migrants have often been attributed to migrants' lack of human capital skills and or cultural and social capital endowments. In the 1960s, to achieve a competitive edge in the global economy, and sustain its population growth, Canada implemented a point system to attract migrants with desirable education and work experience (Green and Green, 1999). Since this policy shift, the demography of migrant cohorts has changed. Currently, skilled migrants, i. e. migrants selected through the point system by virtue of their educational backgrounds and occupational experiences, account for more than 50% of all migrants to Canada (CIC, 2011). A common belief is that recent migrants' labor market outcomes are impeded by their lack of human capital skills (Boyd, 1990). In their research on effects of literacy on migrant's earnings, Ferrer, Green and Riddell (2005) also attribute this migrant dilemma to "Canadian economy usable" kind of literacy. Such workers' qualities are found to be low and unsuitable for employment and hence they attract low jobs and pays. The National Policy on Education (5th ed. 2007) has a bold statement, among others, that education should lead to development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competences of empowering the individual to live in and contribute positively to society.

Despite the above policy statement and various related statutory enactments by both the military and civilian governments on functional skill building and employment targeted education in Nigeria, graduates' productivity quality gaps still exist which need identification and analysis. This paper takes this challenge through investigating how the paradox of official enactments and supposed re-mediation social actions, over the decades, produce the present school-labor quality void. The outcome will feed on-going research efforts towards improving the educational system, labor quality, employment, entrepreneurship and hence national development and social order. It utilizes the survey method and official records. The paper comprises the following sections; introduction, review of relevant literature and theoretical framework, methodology, findings from data analysis, discussion, recommendations and conclusion.

Review Of Literature

The conceptual framework explored in this chapter is the interrelationship of the school system, students' counseling and graduate or labor quality which determines their marketability in employment

situations and entrepreneurship. Literature is replete with this perspective. Education acquired through the school system is the starting point in this linkage.

According to Kobiowo (2009), schools principally perform three functions; developing the cognitive faculties of pupils, cultivating socially approved attitudes and modes of behavior and training for particular vocational roles. However, he emphasizes that societies have three images of schools depending on their socio-cultural and political orientations and these include: a dynamic active set of partners in social change and cultural transformation, instruments of ideological dominant political and economic groups and repositories of traditional values. Education in Nigeria was mainly Western-cum Christian and Islamic focused in Southern Nigeria and Northern Nigeria respectively during the colonial period. The trend exists today, especially at the primary and secondary levels.

Writing on education sector developmental milestones, challenges and prospects, Ashby (1960), documented Nigeria's educational problems on attainment of independence and highlighted some educational development issues like curriculum lacking in science and technology, fragmented educational management, few specialized professions and support services, lack of qualified teachers in technical education, regional imbalances in educational access and attainment and a national education policy. Adeyanju (2014), citing Adesola (2002), observes that in 1966, there were 73 technical and vocational education (TVE) trade centers, crafts and technical institutes with pupil enrolment of 15,509 out of which 1,412 were females. Like the secondary sub-sector, shortage of technical instructors and high running costs were then, as at now, the bane of TVE programme (Adeyanju, 2014).

The above revelations therefore to a large extent explain why skill based graduates or labor quality from our secondary and vocational schools do not possess quality skills, knowledge and attitudes for employment as lower and middle level manpower by many private sector employers that emphasize quality labor in pursuit of corporate profitability, which is primarily the motivation for business ventures. Further, such a situation can hardly encourage graduate entrepreneurship, since the basic principles, rules and practices of entrepreneurial education are lacking. This has the tendency to fuel and grow unemployment.

Quality curriculum should control educational standards to ensure relevance and synergy in the productive process to avoid resource wastes, product rejects and profit downturns. The 1969 National Curriculum Conference, among others, highlighted the philosophy of Nigeria's education, the introduction of guidance and counseling, a diversified curriculum with pre-vocational, vocational and technical subjects and other features, including the 6-3-3-4 system. The Federal Ministry of Education (2007) published the National Policy on Education and emphasized, among others, the provision of vocational and technical subjects, even from the basic level, diversified curriculum and guidance and counseling. Thus, it lays emphasis on and targets production of technicians and technologists to drive the nation's development in a globalized world. If well implemented, secondary and tertiary school graduates should reflect quality in terms of needed skills, attitudes and behaviors.

The deduction from the foregoing is that before 1969, there was no articulated national curriculum that would have prescribed and regulated on educational curriculum direction to enhance not only uniformity, but also minimum standards of contents. Further, the absence of guidance and counseling, as deducible from the 1969 conference meant abandonment of students to their fate on challenges impinging on their studies, without counseling. Counseling is the practice or profession of applying psychological theories and communication skills to clients' personal problems, concerns and aspirations. Some form of counseling also include advice-giving, but the dominant ethos is one of facilitation, without directive guidance (Coleman, 2003). Counseling psychologists deal with problems of adjustments and life stress that do not involve mental illness such as stress related to scholastic, marital and occupational problems. Most colleges have staff members who specialize in problems special to students, such as test anxiety, learning disorders, sleep problems, and family issues (Gazzaniga, Heatherton and Halpen, 2010). Educational psychology, an applied psychology, deals with education

and specifically facilitating students' adjustment to academic and related life. Coleman (2003) posits that the work of the educational psychologist involves the diagnosis and treatment of educational, emotional, and behavioral problems in children of all ages up to the late teens. Major organizations have found it worthwhile to invest in stress counseling but this is almost non-existent in most Nigerian organizations (Ogumbameru, 2008 p. 375).

In his research on university education in Nigeria, Ozorji (2014) highlighted some psycho-social infrastructure issues facing students such as:

Students with special needs often do not receive support services that enable them benefit from Core University experiences...students often encounter learning challenges some of which make them overstay in their various programmes...Often, they are not properly guided, staff are not friendly to them, senior member of teaching and non-teaching staff do not offer mentorship services...To what extent are level coordinators friendly to students in handling their academic problems? (Ozorji, 2014).

The author believes that the challenges facing Nigerian university products predispose them towards lack of competitiveness in terms of quality output. He recommends, among others, provision of psycho-social infrastructure that is people-oriented and based on interactive empathy. Expectedly, low quality graduates are produced by the secondary and vocational as well as the tertiary institutions where psycho-social and relevant infrastructures are lacking. Consequently, they often encounter rejection in the labor market. Hence the Federal Ministry of Education (2014) Conference in March 2002 on Higher Education, cited by Adeyanju (2014) observed:

Participants observed the need to refocus the mission and vision of higher education to make its curriculum relevant, proactive and sensitive to the challenges of globalization...Thousands of unemployed and under-employed unemployable graduates roam the unemployable job market with very little skills to offer...Their education has not been job oriented, nor has it prepared them for self-employment (Adeyanju, 2014).

Consequently, the level of entrepreneurship among the youth is low. Egbo (2009) defines entrepreneurship as a process of creating wealth by bringing together resources in new ways to start a venture that benefits customers and rewards its founders for the innovation. It is the characteristic which an entrepreneur possesses, and is the prime-mover of industrial development. It has the ability to raise productivity through various forms of innovation and to create jobs through the formation of new enterprises, especially small and medium scale enterprises.

The foregoing therefor reveals that the school system, the environment and the government do not effectively support and drive quality labor output from the educational system, hence the relatively low entrepreneurship, thus facilitating unemployment.

Theoretical Framework

The multi-dimensional approach to entrepreneurship is used to explain the conceptual framework on the relationship between the school system, students' counseling and graduate or labor quality which determines their marketability in employment situations and entrepreneurship. The multidimensional approach was developed by Bradley (1990) and locates entrepreneurship in the cluster of the individual, environment, the organization and venture process where each factor has many attributes. The individual component deals with the initial need for achievement, focus and risk mentality, education, age and other attributes. The environmental factors involve the necessary imputes such as government influences, proximity of educational institutions, technical skills, markets etc. The organization aspect involves its internal mission, vision, adaptation, market and related forces. The process involves production planning, production and distribution dynamics.

Thus, this approach is a dynamic multi-faced and interactive process of a pool of individual initiatives in adaptive relationship with other systems and institutions. This approach leads us to draw a conclusion that the Nigeria school system due to limiting factors, particularly from the environment and

government, does not adequately counsel and prepare students for high level skills acquisition for employment in modern organization and entrepreneurship.

Methodology

This section of the paper is structured as follows: study location, population sample, sampling techniques, data collection and analysis.

Study Location

The study was carried out in Abuja, at the National Youths Service Corps (NYSC) corporate headquarters. Established in 1973 by the Yakubu Gowon military administration, its objectives as contained in Decree No 51, 16 June, 1993, among others, include: Inculcating in Nigerian youths the ideals of national achievement, accelerated growth of the national economy, and skills for self-improvement. The one year programme specifically targets foreign and Nigerian tertiary institutions (universities and polytechnics) graduates below 30 years.

Sample population

The total number of registered graduates was 244,532 generated from Nigeria's 40 federal, 40 state and 62 private universities, and also from 25 federal, 40 state and 32 private polytechnics as at march, 2016., from its initial 2,364 graduates at inception in 1973 (News Herald, 2016). This research focused on the youth corps members. The rationale for focusing on the graduates was that as the main beneficiaries of the school system, they have opinions, more than other stakeholders on the dimensions of the Nigerian school system, the place of counseling and related learning challenges in context of the subject matter.

Sampling technique

A sample population of only 120 Nigerian trained graduates was drawn for sampling. National survey samples range from 1,000 while regional samples range from 50 to 1000 (Drew and Hardman, 1996). This makes the sample adequate. Foreign graduates were eliminated because they might not adequately understand the Nigerian school system as their locally trained counterparts.

The purposive sampling technique was employed to sample the 120 respondents as they daily visited the office for official business. As cohorts who normally wear the service uniforms, they were easily identified. Once identified at the reception area, and since all of them have the probability of being sampled, they were politely introduced to the research topic. A vast majority of them willingly volunteered to be sampled. Respondents were sampled at the office reception as they walked in. Majority of the questionnaire were collected later on the respondents' exist. Only 113 questionnaires were returned while 3 were invalid. Only 110 questionnaires were therefore analyzed. Three research assistants were used for data collection which lasted for three days in March, 2017.

Data collection

Data was collected through the use of questionnaires. The questionnaires contained mainly structured questions and a few unstructured one with focus on the study objectives. Reliability and validity tests were done in the same office in February, 2017 and necessary adjustments were made, where necessary.

Table 1 data reveal that 51% of the respondents' mean age is between 21 and 25 years, largely Christians with almost three quarters being holders of bachelor's degrees. Three quarters of the respondents were from the South East and South West geopolitical zones which confirms the World Bank Group (2016) report that the North has less access to education than the South. This north-south imbalance in access to education has the implication of generating north-south imbalances in employment, wealth and poverty distributions.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

Table 1. Respondents' background data

Age			Religion			Education			Geo-political Zonal Distr.		
Group	Fre	%	Group	Fre	%	Ed.Level	Fre	%	Zone	Fre	%
<21	4	3.6	Christianity	72	65.5	HND	25	22.7	NE	4	3.6
21-25	56	50.9	Muslim	30	27.2	BA/BSC	81	73.6	NW	6	5.5
26-30	50	45.45	Others	8	7.2	PG	4	3.6	NC	10	9.1
									SE	40	36.4
									SW	41	37.3
									SS	9	8.2
Total	110	100	Total	110	100		110	100	Total	110	100

From table 2 data, respondents express inadequacies of vocational and secondary schools as well as tertiary institutions with 55, 64 and 65 percent ratings respectively. This confirms Adeyanju (2014): Nigeria's universities offered only 16.6 percent annual average admission to qualified candidates annually between 2008 and 2012. In terms of physical facilities, 57 percent of the respondents rated them as inadequate. Equally only 14 percent rated the curriculum as adequate while 62 percent rated them as inadequate. The results indicate conditions of lack of access to education for the mass population, insufficiency of learning tools, including classrooms, laboratories and curriculum that is hardly targeted towards skills acquisition for graduates, thus fostering low quality graduates.

Table 2. Respondent's attitudes towards educational resource availability and quality

Voc. schools available			Secondary schools			Tertiary			School. Curriculum			Physical facilities		
Availability	Fre.	%	Avail.	Fre.	%	Avail.	Fre.	%	Quality	Fre.	%	Avail.	Fre.	%
V.adequate	1	.9	Vadeq.	8	7.3	Vadeq.	9	8.2	Vadeq.	7	6.4	Vadeq.	10	9.1
Adequate	17	15.5	Adeq.	10	9.1	Adeq.	11	10	Adequate	15	13.6	Adeq.	17	15.5
Inadequate	60	54.5	Inadeq.	70	64	Inadeq.	71	65	Invadeq.	68	61.8	Invadeq.	63	57.3
V. inad.(VI)	30	27.3	VInad.	21	19.1	VI	18	16.4	VInadeq.	17	15.5	VInadq.	12	10.9
Negligible	2	2	Negl.	1	.9	Negl	1	.9	Negl	3	2.7	Negli.	8	7.3
Total	110	100	Total	110	100	Total	110	100	Total	110	100	Total	110	100

From table 3, respondents highly need counseling (55 percent) but only 35 percent counseling is available. A total of 61 percent of the respondents stated that students counseling is negligible. In terms of quality, 42 percent rated it as average with 35 percent rating it as bad. Only 21 percent view counseling quality as good and very good.

Further, 48 percent and 27 percent of the respondents view their counselors' attitudes as average and good. Only 37 percent of the respondents view the counselors in the good category. Students counseling quality is rated bad, but counselors' attitudes and the impact of the environment on their emotional stability have above average ratings. The counselors' attitude rating can be explained by students' sympathetic appreciation of the lecturers and counselors' persistent demand for systemic educational improvement which, effected, will benefit all stakeholders, including the students. The low impact factor can be explained from their responses that they are 'family' and 'self advised' (46 and 18 percent respectively). Traditionally, even before and after matriculation, many educated parents, relations and siblings usually offer parental advice to their children and young ones and communicate with them on common learning challenges. This has been facilitated by ICT penetration in Nigeria where almost every student has a telephone handset.

Table 4. Respondents' attitudes on impact of school environment and how they cope

Impact			Sources of counseling			Labor quality			Future plans		
Satisfaction Index	Fre	%	Sources	Fre	%	Quality	Fre	%	Items	Fre	%
Excellent	12.0	10.9	Family	50.0	45.5	Excellent	6.0	5.5	Self-emp	13.0	11.8
Very good	16.0	14.5	Peers	10.0	9.0	Very good	8.0	7.3	Seek empl	35.0	31.8
Good	30.0	27.3	Counselors, Level Advs.	15.0	13.6	Good	50.0	45.5	Further studies	10.0	9.0
Bad	42.0	38.2	Acad/non acad staff	15.0	13.6	Bad	32.0	29.1	Undecided	2.0	1.8
Very Bad	10.0	9.0	Self-advice	20.0	18.2	V.Adm.	14.0	12.7			
Total	110	100	Total	110	100	Total	110	100	Total	110	100

Respondents view the impact of school environment, table 4, in the bad category, 47 percent. However, majority of the responses are categorized as positive (good and above), accounting for 52 percent of total responses on the impact of the environment on their emotional stability. This is a good rating, considering the general negative evaluation on the mainly physical environment in the proceeding table. This could be explained from their responses that they are 'family' and 'self-advised' (46 and 18 percent respectively). Many educated parents, relations and siblings, usually advise their children and young ones and communicate with them on common vital emotional and educational challenges and this has been facilitated by ICT penetration in Nigeria where almost every student has a telephone handset. Judging by their own standard, almost a consolidated 60 percent view themselves as qualified or good for employment (46, 7 and 6 as good, very good and excellent respectively). They might believe that whatever quality gaps that exist in their attainments could be easily bridged with work exposure and training. Thus, 46 percent would seek formal employment while 32 have the entrepreneurship confidence. Possibly, since only 46 percent feel good, quality wise, it prompted 12 percent inclination towards post NYSC professional training towards entrepreneurship.

Table 5. Respondents' recommendations for improving the school system and graduates quality

S/N	Items	Frequency	Percentage
1	Education to have the highest budget.	35.0	31.8
2	Got to priorities education with bias for tech. education	25.0	22.7
3	Reduce corruption	20.0	18.2
4	Political offices/ political office holders emoluments	8.0	7.3
5	Reduce security cost	7.0	6.4
6	SUG empowerment to check corruption in schools	5.0	4.5
7	Public/private partnership in running education	3.0	2.7
8	Open more universities	4.0	3.6
9	Others	3.0	2.7
Total		110	100

From an open ended question, the respondents made recommendations for improving the school system and the quality of its graduates as recorded in table 5 above. The responses are presented in their rank order. Education should receive the highest budget, prioritization of technical education at all levels and reduction of systemic corruption record the highest scores of 32, 23 and 18 percent respectively with a consolidated 73 percent. Thus, respondents believe that emphasis on education generally, specifically technical education, with highest budgetary allocation of all ministerial allocations, will reduce the problem of quality and quality gaps in the system, more so, if the programming and expenditure patterns are corruption free. Education and training should always be prioritized as facilitators for human empowerment and national development.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Having investigated NYSC members on the school system, with emphasis on technical and vocational education at all levels in Nigeria and how these have impacted on them in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes acquired, based on the results obtained and discussion made, the following recommendations and conclusions are proffered.

- i. Government should drive human capital development as the regulator of all institutions
- ii. Education should receive the highest budgetary allocation.
- iii. All stages of educational project implementation (planning, up to monitoring and evaluation) should be insulated from narrow and divisive interests and politics.
- iv. Education experts or professionals, both serving and retired, should drive Nigeria's educational revolution, a sector that is in a near crisis condition.
- v. In a globalized and technology driven world, prioritization of vocational education should be pursued to facilitate production of quality or knowledgeable and skilled graduate for entrepreneurship and overall marketability.
- vi. Facilities availability (classrooms, laboratories, workshops, clinics etc.) and upgrade should be highly priority, to be determined by seasoned professionals.
- vii. Students' counseling and training of counselors should be issues of priority

In conclusion, Nigeria's human capital production is poor in quality and quantity and one of the means of improving the situation is by improving the main platform for production of knowledge, attitudes and skills, the school system, formal, non-formal and informal. Government should have the political will to design and implement utilitarian policies and programmes that benefit the generality of the population, in the aspects of access to both vocational and general education, effective educational financing, quality students counseling and monitoring of projects devoid of corruption and politics.

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