

YOUTH ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME AND UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE SOUTH EASTERN NIGERIA: EBONYI STATE IN PERSPECTIVE (2015-2023)

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Abstract

All over the world today, serious attention is being paid by various governments to secure economic survival through entrepreneurship growth and development by providing the enabling environments like infrastructure, financial facilities and other empowerment that can stimulate entrepreneurship development and thus engage the youth productively to reduce the rate of unemployment and crime in the society. This is so because it is now obvious that governments can no longer provide jobs for the teeming unemployed youth, a situation which has been blamed to be the major cause for the rapid increase of violent crimes among the youth today. Consequently, this paper sought among other things to evaluate the prospects of entrepreneurship in reduction of youth unemployment in Ebonyi State, Nigeria and to verify how technical innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship education can be used as a panacea to unemployment problems of the youth, and thus, promote economic development. Content analysis method was used for the study. The Schumpeter's Theory of Entrepreneurship was adopted as a foundation for theoretical framework. The study revealed that technical innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship education have positive influence on the life of the youth and in reduction of youth unemployment. The implication of the study is that there are lots of prospects in entrepreneurship in reduction of youth unemployment, which prospects ranges from the acquisition of technical and innovative skills, creative abilities, job creation, generation of personal income etc. The study recommended that governments at all levels and policy makers should redirect its policies towards entrepreneurship development and provision of enabling environments that encourage youth entrepreneurship; to productively engage the increasing youth population in technical innovation; that creativity should be encouraged and rewarded by both governments and private individuals or organization where youth who distinguish themselves should be encouraged financially.

Keywords: Youth, entrepreneurship, programme, poverty, reduction, south east, ebonyi

Introduction

Policy makers in Nigeria and the world over have recognized that one of the most critical challenges facing the world today is youth unemployment (Olufemi, 2020). Nigeria is regarded as one of the countries with the highest rates of youth unemployment in the world due to lack of employment skills, technical innovation and creativity, and consequently creating a very wide skill gap (Gomez and Bayon, 2017). Youth unemployment in Nigeria is observed to be on the increase, and various efforts made to reduce same seem not to be yielding significant results, (Aina, Abdulrahman and Abdulwasii, 2019).

According to Bureau of Statistics (2021), Nigeria's unemployment and underemployment rates are combined at 55.7% at the end of the second quarters of 2020, with Nigeria having the highest population of about 177 million people in Africa, which about 70% are youth (Olufemi, 2020). Obviously, Nigeria is blessed with human and natural resources, but after sixty years of independence, Nigeria's economy is

still monolithic, depending on oil as a significant source of revenue. Thus, Nigeria is today referred to as a paradoxical nation that is blessed with enormous resources but most confronted with high unemployment as a result of the fast disappearing of traditional carrier paths and opportunities (Ikechi-Ekpendu, 2016).

Entrepreneurship development becomes a desideratum to the Nigeria economy in general and Ebonyi state in particular, as it is considered as the economic backbone of nations, necessary for job creation, economic growth, poverty alleviation, reduction of youth restiveness. Entrepreneurship activities stimulate economic growth, reduce social vices and it is recognized as a significant component of employment generation and technical innovation. There is therefore, positive correlation between entrepreneurship development, employment generation and economic development (Olufemi, 2020).

The desire to diversify and grow the Nigerian economy as well as create substantial number of jobs for the teeming youth population has therefore, been expressed by successive administrations for the past three decade. Yet unemployment has continued to be a major challenge of the Nigerian state. Indeed, Nigeria has been grappling with high rate of unemployment in the last 30 years (Kalagbor and Deinibiteim, 2019).

Available records show that the unemployment challenge was most devastating or at its peak in the past five years (Harry, 2016). This was further exacerbated in the wake of the country slipping into recession in 2016 and the attendant sack of personnel by organizations in the different sectors of the economy. Hence, making desire for gainful employment in both the public and private sectors a mirage for increasing number of youths graduating from various institutions of learning. Efforts by successive administrations to address the unemployment challenge through the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Graduate Internship scheme, N-Power, various agricultural schemes have yielded little or no remarkable outcomes. Hence, the encouragement of entrepreneurship development among youths, especially in the agricultural sector.

Essentially, the drive towards youth entrepreneurship is anchored on the belief that it will make good number of the youths create jobs for themselves and also employ others. On the understanding of this, Nigeria had hoped to be one of the biggest economies in 2020 and to be able to stand and compete effectively amongst the big nations of the world. This can be achieved by being self-sufficiency through entrepreneurship development by engaging the youths to reduce unemployment, increase export and decrease import. (Okoye, Illoanya and Udunze, 2014). Economic sabotage through, pipe line vandalization, militancy and kidnapping of oil workers, armed robbery, banditry and other vices amongst the youths, were also hoped, will no longer prevail in our society. But the extent to which these wishes were met in Nigeria in general and Ebonyi state in particular, within the period under study, vice-a-vise the current status of unemployment in Nigeria, which is rapidly on the increase and the happenings is better imagined than told.

In Ebonyi State, within the period under review, there has not been any open government employment opportunity where the mass unemployed youth were engaged. Few of the unemployed youth who ought to have been actively involved in the activities and programmes of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the Graduate Internship scheme of the federal government, the N-Power, various agricultural schemes of the federal government in partnership with the state government, which the state keyed into and extended in the state missed out because of over politicization of the programmes in the state. The opportunities were shared to only party faithful, but not the targeted youth. The state has however, embarked on various agricultural schemes such as the *one man, one hectare*, policy of the state government, granting of loan and giving of subsidies to young genuine farmers, where the young farmers were to produce any crop of their choice and the government would buy the produce in bulk after harvest,

encouraging Small and Medium Enterprises through the ministry of business development and the department of Community and Social Development Agency. The state government has also embarked on skill acquisition programmes, where a good number of the unemployed youth were trained on Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and at the end Laptop Computers procured for them to encourage them get established. Added, the government also engaged about 1500 unemployed youth into government appointments as Technical Assistants (TAs) and Senior Technical Assistants (STAs) with monthly payments to enable them accumulate fund and start up something doing. The aim of the state, at least in principle, is to reduce youth unemployment and shun crimes in the state. It is however, important to point out here, that as much as these policy and programmes of the government were good in principle, the impacts were not felt much owing to the insincerity of the government, which politicized the programmes, by giving the loan and the agricultural incentives to only few party loyalists; with little or no effect, as the rate of youth unemployment and crimes seem not to have reduced.

The youths occupy a large portion of the total population, and the tertiary institutions of different kinds, universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, are turning out graduates every year and there is no available job to absorb them. Entrepreneurship education where innovative skills, vocational abilities, empowerment, provision of infrastructures and other essential facilities should be taught and acquired, formally or informally becomes very imperative (Okeke, Ngige, Onowu, and Ugwu, 2020). Teaching entrepreneurship in schools as a single course is not enough, but young entrepreneurs need and must be fully equipped with the essential skills and abilities to create employment opportunities for themselves and others and to turn around the economy (Agu, Anidiobu and Ezinwa, 2016). There is now strong evidence from studies that self-employment increases the happiness of individuals through increase in standard of living (Benz and Freyi, 2008 quoted in Okeke, Ngige, Onowu, and Ugwu, 2020).

Consequently, youth entrepreneurship, not oil nor civil service nor politics, is the future of any global economy in the 21st century (Odoh and Erne, 2014), and Ebonyi State, Nigeria is not an exception. Hence, this study.

Statement of the Problem

It has been observed that for any nation to develop and grow economically, such a nation must diversify its economy through entrepreneurship. Thus, entrepreneurship development has become a desideratum to the Nigeria economy in general and Ebonyi state in particular, as it is considered as the economic backbone of nations, necessary for job creation, which will lead to reduction in youth unemployment and crime rates. Entrepreneurship activities such as the setting up of enterprises, fashion design, shoe making, hair dressing saloon, barbing saloon, computer business centres, phones repair, beads making, poultry, piggery stimulate economic growth, reduce social vices and it is recognized as a significant component of employment generation and technical innovation. There is therefore, positive correlation between entrepreneurship development, employment generation and economic development (Olufemi, 2020). Of all the above benefits of entrepreneurship, the most prominent in the third world economies, Nigeria inclusive, is to create employment opportunities and reduce unemployment and its attendant consequences.

However, youth unemployment has been in the increase in Nigeria and in extension, Ebonyi State due to lack of commitment, insincerity and over-politicization of various entrepreneurship development programmes of the government. Thus, the unemployment rate in Nigeria as of the second quarter of 2020 stood at 27.1%. This implies that about 21,764,614 (21.7million) Nigerians are unemployed, (Olufemi,

2020). The population of the youth of this unemployed Nigerians is about 70 %. The implication is that many youths in our society today cannot find job anywhere, which is as a result of lack of employment opportunities and the unmatched increase in population. The situation became worse with the recent economic recession.

Again, within the period under review, there have not been adequate entrepreneurship development programmes commensurate with the rapid increase of unemployed youth in Ebonyi State. This has made job creation through technical innovation, creativity, opportunity recognition difficult. There has also been inadequate infrastructural development, such as steady power supply and easy accessibility of credit facilities which will revive the economic prospects of the state, and reduce the level of unemployment, while boosting the living standard of the youths and reducing crime rates drastically to a very low level.

Added, the high number of youth graduates from the state who pass out from various tertiary institutions without requisite skills, into the labour market to join the already existing numbers of unemployed youths; with no government employment waiver forthcoming is a problem and calls for concern. Some of these unemployed youths who are desperate in getting something tangible to do now migrate to Europe through the Sahara Desert and Mediterranean Sea which involves a lot of risk and tragedy to their lives; causing death and slavery for those who manage to survive. This is in addition to the socio-economic consequences inherent. Thus, youth unemployment has become a global phenomenon of the 21st century with the highest rate recorded in the developing nations, such as Nigeria, India, Gambia. The problem is however, becoming more complex in Nigeria, and Ebonyi State in particular due to the failure of the unemployed youths to embrace agriculture as a means to curb youth unemployment in the state.

It is therefore, against this backdrop that this present study evaluates youth entrepreneurship development programmes and unemployment in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the study

The broad objective of this study is to evaluate youth entrepreneurship development programmes and unemployment in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to;

1. Ascertain the extent to which youth skills acquisition has reduced youth unemployment in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.
2. Determine the extent to which youth involvement in agriculture has induced employment generation among the youth of Ebonyi state, Nigeria.

Youth unemployment

The term youth unemployment refers to a situation which results when young people - defined by the United Nations as people between the ages of 15 - 24 years old are looking for jobs but cannot find them (Mercy-Corps, 2020). Although, the definition of official youth age varies country to country; the age at which a person is considered a youth varies worldwide, however, the World Bank puts the age to be from 15-24 years, the United Nations General Assembly, 15-24 years, and the Commonwealth Youth Programme, 15-29 years (Olufemi, 2020).

In Nigeria, however, any person who is up to 18 years old is legally considered an 'adult' with voting

rights. Hence, youth is defined by the National Population Commission (NPC) in 2013 as people between ages 15 and 34 years. Again, the Nigerian Youth Policy document defined youth as persons between the ages of 18 - 35 years.

African countries, generally, however, consider the United Nations age limit of 15 - 24 years as too narrow considering the economic, political and socio-cultural situations. Therefore, the African Youth Charter of 2006 defined youth as persons between the age of 15 - 35 years.

In another development, Adawo and Atan (2013) in Olufemi (2020) averred that unemployed youth are persons between the youth age bracket who do not have a job but are actively seeking work. Unemployed youth therefore, are persons that are qualified for a job (whether the job is physical or mental), and willing to work at the correct rate of wages, but do not find a job. And for International Labour Organization (ILO) (2012) in Ikechi-Ikpendu (2016), it is a situation where people are without jobs and they are searching actively for the jobs in the past four years. Also, the ILO has defined unemployed youth as members of the economically active population who are without works but available for and seeking work, including those who have lost their jobs and those who voluntarily left work, (World Bank, 1998).

The above definition is in line with the views of Okoye, Iloanya and Udunze (2014), who described youth unemployment as a situation where the active population, especially the youths, are willing to work and are able to work, ready to work and are seeking for work, but the jobs are not available for them to work. They went on to contend that there is an alarming rate of more than three million people annually moving into the labour market of persons of above 15 years. This observation no doubt, captures the situation in Nigeria in the recent years, particularly, Ebonyi state where for the period under review, there have not been any government waiver on employment, despite the fact that every year, graduates are being turned out from various institutions of learning.

For Fajana (2000), youth unemployment refers to a situation where there are youth who are willing and capable of working but are unable to find suitable paid employment. He argued that youth unemployment is one of the macro-economic problems which every responsible government is expected to monitor and regulate. This is because, the higher the unemployment rate in an economy the higher would be the poverty level and associated welfare challenges. Fajana (2000), and Alao (2005) have identified the following types of unemployment:

Structural unemployment: This occurs when there is a change in the structure of an industry or the economic activities of the country. This may be due to use of outdated technology, deficiency of capital resources in relation to their demand and the product or service is no longer in demand.

Frictional Unemployment: It is caused by industrial friction in which jobs may exist, yet the workers may be unable to fill them either because they do not possess the necessary skill, or because they are not aware of the existence of such jobs. Those who are employable may remain unemployed on account of shortage of raw materials, or mechanical defects in the working of plants. Therefore, the better the economy is doing, the lower this type of unemployment is likely to occur.

Seasonal Unemployment: This unemployment is due to seasonal variations in the activities of particular industries caused by climatic changes, changes in fashions or by the inherent nature of such industries. In the tropical region, ice factories are less active in rainy season because demand for ice is low. Seasonal oriented industries are bound to give rise to seasonal unemployment.

Cyclical or Keynesian unemployment: It is unemployment due to the operation of the business cycle. This is a situation whereby the demand for labour becomes deficient to supply. In other words, when the

aggregate demand falls below the full employment level. It is characterized by an economy wide shortage of jobs and usually last as long as the cyclical depression lasts.

Technological Unemployment: This is the type of unemployment caused by changes in the techniques of production. Hence a situation whereby man is replaced by machines and technological changes are taking place constantly, leading to the increased mechanization of the production process. The result is the displacement of labour and finally causing unemployment due to globalization (Oladele, *et al*, 2011).

Residual Unemployment: This is caused by personal factors such as old age, physical or mental disability, poor work attitudes and inadequate training.

Of these types of unemployment, the most common and which contribute greatly in causing youth unemployment in Nigeria are the frictional and residual unemployment. This is because most Nigerian youth are either untrained or are lacking requisite employable skills; thereby making it difficult for them to get employed. Hence, Okoye, Iloanya and Udunze (2014), have argued that Nigeria is no longer a productive country; it is a dumping ground for imports. Its economy provides jobs for outsiders not the people at home. It has since exported many of its best hands to other countries in a corrosive brain drain syndrome. The unemployment situation is so bad that university graduates stay at home for upwards of ten years unable to find a thing to do. Education has become unattractive as employers of labour complain about the rising population of unemployable Nigerians. The fashion these days is for many employers to reserve spaces for Nigerians with foreign qualifications. Nigeria's higher institutions are producing a steady stream of graduates whose skills are suspect, and whose work ethic is abhorrent. The crisis cannot be fully described. But at the root of it is the failure of government and leadership.

To make a difference, Nigerian governments must take practical steps. What is required is not rhetoric, nor bureaucracy. The way forward is for the government to encourage the youth to be self-employed through creation of an enabling environment for entrepreneurship development, business and investment opportunities for developed entrepreneurs. Thus, whatever the type and cause of youth unemployment, entrepreneurship is its answer.

Entrepreneurship development

Entrepreneurship is more than simply starting a business. It is a process through which individuals identify opportunities, allocate resources, and create value. This creation of value is often through the identification of unmet needs or through the identification of opportunities for change. It is the act of being an entrepreneur which is seen as "one who undertakes innovations with finance and business acumen in an effort to transform innovations into economic goods hence, Entrepreneurs see "problems" as "opportunities," and then take action to identify the solutions to those problems and the customers who will pay to have those problems solved.

Entrepreneurial success is simply a function of the ability of an entrepreneur to see opportunities in the marketplace, initiate change (or take advantage of change) and create value through solutions. According to Obi (2010) for the Nigerian youth to survive in Entrepreneurship, the following skills are required; he/she must be a high achiever, risk-taker, self-confident, resourceful, goal setter, task oriented, innovative, future oriented, communication ability and technical knowledge.

Sinks and Vale (1990) defined entrepreneurship as an unrehearsed combination of economic resources instigated by the uncertain prospect of temporary monopoly profit. Hence, Kanothi, (2009) defined Entrepreneur as the instigator of entrepreneurial events for so long as they occur.

Tijani-Alawiye (2004) defines entrepreneurship as the process of increasing the supply of entrepreneurs or adding to the stock of existing small, medium and big enterprises available to a country by creating and promoting many capable entrepreneurs, who can successfully run innovative enterprises, nurture them to growth and sustain them, with a view to achieving broad socio-economic developmental goals. One of these goals is sustaining employment.

Furthermore, Acs and Szerb (2007) noted that entrepreneurship revolves around the realization of existence of opportunities in combination with decision to commercialize them by starting a new firm. More importantly, Schnurr and Newing (1997) justified the need for promoting entrepreneurship culture on the ground that youth in all societies have sterling qualities such as resourcefulness, initiative, drive, imagination, enthusiasm, zest, dash, ambition, energy, boldness, audacity and courage which are all valuable traits for entrepreneurship development. Supporting this assertion, Bennell (2007) maintained that governments, NGOs and international bodies seeking to improve youth livelihoods could best pursue their empowerment objective by tapping into the dynamism of young people and build on their strong spirit of risk-taking through entrepreneurship development. Entrepreneurship development has also led to employment generation, growth of the economy and sustainable development.

It has therefore, been argued that the gross abuse and under-utilization of human resources in Nigeria with direct impact on national productivity and competitiveness can only be achieved in Nigeria through entrepreneurship development (Kalagbor and Deinibitein. 2019). The essence of entrepreneurship development is the ability to envision and chart a course for a new business venture by combining information from the functional disciplines and from the external environment in the context of technical innovation, and skill acquisition to engage in self-help venture. It then manifests itself in creative strategies, innovative tactics, uncanny perception of trends and market mood changes and courageous leadership.

Entrepreneurship when treated as enterprise creation helps develop new skills and experiences that can be applied to many other challenging areas in life, including employment. Schnurr and Newing (1997) have also justified the need for promoting entrepreneurship culture on the ground that youth in all societies have sterling qualities such as resourcefulness, initiative, drive, imagination, enthusiasm, ambition, energy, boldness, audacity and courage which are all valuable traits for entrepreneurship development. Supporting this assertion, Bennell (2017) maintained that governments, NGOs and international bodies seeking to improve youth livelihoods could best pursue their empowerment objective by tapping into the dynamism of young people and build on their strong spirit of risk-taking through entrepreneurship development.

There seems to be a general consensus that Entrepreneurship development has led to employment generation, growth of the economy and sustainable development as the current number of colleges and universities offering small business management and entrepreneurship development programme has grown from one university in 1947 to over 1600 in the 1990s (Solomon, *et al.* 2002). For instance, in Zambia, it was show that 25% of the youth are self-employed (Chigunta, 2001). Most of these young people, especially younger youth, tend to be concentrated in marginal trading and service activities. Also, findings in Ghana of small-scale enterprises reveal that young people owned almost 40 percent of the enterprises (Osei, Baah- Nuakoh, Tutu, and Sowa, 1993). Similarly, research in South Africa suggests that the probability of self-employment among young people rises with age (Chigunta, 2001).

In Nigerian, however, unemployed youth are mentored and provided the needed resources and enabling environment for business start-ups, to be economically engaged. This is entrepreneurship development;

aimed at shunning the illegal acts of hostage-taking, kidnapping, bombing and vandalism and homelessness, among other vices, which characterizes the present-day Nigerian youths. It is noteworthy, that in every act of entrepreneurship development, a new firm is raised hence, entrepreneurship is enterprise-creation and employment generation. Often times, millionaires and billionaire are made. Thus, in Nigeria and everywhere, entrepreneurship development is all about the creation of various small and medium enterprises by various individuals whom, if not employed *ab-initio*, becomes self-employed automatically and usually end up an employer of labour

Causes of youth unemployment in Nigeria

In the study of unemployment in Nigeria, Adebayo (1999), Alanana (2003), Echebiri (2005), Morphy (2008 and Awogbenle and Iwuamadi (2010) have identified the main causes of youth unemployment in Nigeria. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020), the unemployment rate in Nigeria is at 33.28 percent. Between 2015 and 2020, the unemployment rate grew. For instance, the current unemployment rate in Nigeria in 2021 is 35 per cent while urban unemployment was estimated at 29.5 per cent in 2020. It also predicted that the nation's currency would fall by about three per cent this year, even as it anticipated a correction in the stock market.

Nevertheless, the observed causes of unemployment in Nigeria, among other things include: The rapidly growing urban labour force arising from rural urban migration: Rural-urban migration is usually explained in terms of push-pull factors. The push factors include the pressure resulting from man-land ratio in the rural areas and the existence of serious underemployment arising from the seasonal cycle of climate. The factors are further exacerbated in Nigeria and most developing societies due to the increase of war and epidemic in most of these societies, likewise the lack of infrastructural facilities, which makes the rural life unattractive. Youths therefore, move to urban areas with the probability of securing lucrative employment in the industries. In addition to this, there is the concentration of social amenities in the urban centers. This means that the rural areas are neglected in the allocation of social and economic opportunities.

Rapid population growth: Going by the 2006 census in Nigeria, the nation's population was put at 140,431, 790 and projections for the future indicate that the population could be over 180 million by the year 2020, given the annual growth rate of 4.5 percent (National Population Commission and ICF Macro, 2012). Thus, in the long-term, the Nigeria Population is projected to trend around 210.87 million in 2021 and 215.87 million in 2022. With this population, Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa. It is argued that the high population growth rate has resulted in the rapid growth of the labour force, which is far outstripping the supply of jobs. The accelerated growth of population on Nigeria's unemployment problem is multifaceted. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2020), Nigeria's unemployment rate stood at 35 percent. This affects the supply side through a high and rapid increase in the labour force relative to the absorptive capacity of the economy, and thereby cause unemployment.

The outdated school curricula and lack of employable skills. Some scholars and commentators have argued that as far as the formal sector is concerned, the average Nigeria graduate is not employable and, therefore, does not possess the skills needed by the employers of labour for a formal employment. After all employers do not need people to pay or spend their money on but people that will help their organization grow and make more profit as the primary goal of enterprise is to make profit. Often, this is attributed to the Nigeria's education system, with its liberal bias. The course contents of most tertiary education in Nigeria lack entrepreneurial contents that would have enabled graduates to become

job creators rather than job seekers. Hence, the recent quest for the introduction of entrepreneurial education courses and department among tertiary educational institutions today.

The rapid expansion of the educational system which directly leads to increase in the supply of educated manpower above the corresponding demand for them. This is yet another cause of unemployment in Nigeria. With the creation of six new universities in the country by the President Goodluck Administration, more youths graduate without jobs. This contributes to the problem of the youth unemployment in Nigeria. Presently, with over 97 universities in Nigeria (both federal, state, and private) and the increasing demand for higher education, there has been the problem of suitable employment for the varieties of graduates who are turned out by these higher institutions every year.

Ordinarily, this should not have been a problem, but the reality is that the Nigerian economy is too weak to absorb this large number of graduates (Utomi, 2011). Further, there is no vibrant manufacturing sector which has the capacity to absorb unemployed youths in Nigeria, as there are over 800 collapsed industries in Nigeria and over 37 factories have closed shops in 2009. In a nutshell, Nigeria is a country with numerous business and investment potentials due to the abundant, vibrant and dynamic human and natural resources it possesses. As good as the foregoing sounds, Nigeria continues to experience its share of social, economic and political upheavals which have often stunted its growth and development into the regional economic power that it strives to attain. Nigeria has a relative high rate of violent crimes (Onwubiko, 2017).

The fact is that Nigeria is becoming hostile to investment due especially, to lack of steady and sustainable power supply; energy crisis in spite of the various attempts at reviving this sector leading to firms depending on generators for their operation whose cost of buying, fueling and maintenance are high, thereby increasing the cost of operation in Nigeria. Besides, the high and multiple levies and taxations being paid by these companies, have combined to make the cost of doing business in Nigeria to be very exorbitant. When the industries and factories closed shops or relocated to a friendlier economic environment, workers are bound to be laid off and prospects of recruiting new ones dashed. All these exacerbated the crisis of youth unemployment in the labor market (Onifade, 2011).

Corruption: this is another important fact causing youth unemployment in Nigeria. Corruption no doubt, has permeated the entire social structure of Nigeria, and has robbed the country of developing a vibrant economic base. Funds meant for development projects have been misappropriated, diverted, or embezzled and stashed away in foreign banks, while some incompetent and corrupt bureaucrats and administrators in the public enterprises and parastatals have liquidated organizations, they are placed to superintend (Okafor, 2011).

The point being made here is that the collaboration of the political elites, local and foreign contractors in the inflation of contract fees have robbed Nigeria of the chances of using more than \$500 billion estimated revenue from the oil sale in the last 54 years to develop a vibrant economy that would have created jobs for the youths in various sectors of the economy. The ruling (political) class failed because they replaced the vision, policy, and strategy, which should be the thrust of every leadership with transactions (contract award and other mundane money related activities), as each successive government took turns to prey on the nation's wealth, by using public power, resources, good will, utilities, instrument of abuse, and personal gains (Okafor, 2005). Thus, crippling the economy and engendering and exacerbating unemployment which creates abject poverty, hunger and frustration; killing the zeal and means for entrepreneurship development in the Nigerian youths.

Constraints of entrepreneurship in employment creation

Constraints of entrepreneurship development could either be economic resources or human resources. Economic resources are made up of labour, land, capital and entrepreneurial abilities which when combined produce a great output. The key roles of entrepreneurship include mobilization of domestic savings for investment, significant contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and Gross National Income (GNI), harnessing of local raw materials, employment creation, poverty reduction and alleviation, enhancement in standard of living, increase in per capita income, skills acquisition, advancement in technology and expert growth and diversification.

Irrespective of the benefits associated with entrepreneurship, there are lots of barriers that have prevented willing youths from fully realizing their potentials and assuming responsibilities in the society. These barriers are however differently grouped by different authors and scholars in the literature. According to Onwubiko (2017), the barriers to entrepreneurship were grouped under the following sub-headings:

- Absence of infrastructural facilities
- Inadequate working capital
- Low standard of education
- Lack of adequate training

In another development, He (2000) has argued that there are factors that could shape the success or failure of a potential entrepreneur. They include the following, political, legal, ethnical, economic, cultural, social and physical. They play a role in stifling the dreams and aspirations of the youth towards assuming entrepreneurship positions. Economic factors such as policy reversals, high and double taxations, difficulty in procuring business approvals, high inflation and unstable exchange rates are some of the areas of concern for the potential entrepreneur who is in most cases pushed into entrepreneurship due to inadequate white collar jobs. Despite the above, there are basically three major factors that hinders entrepreneurship in Nigeria: structural, cultural and the lack of political will by policy makers.

Structurally, structural inhibitors in the growth of entrepreneurship have its origin in the Nigerian education policies since independence in 1960. Another related structural problem is the low budgetary allocation to the education sector, particularly the vocational and technical education sub sector. Poor leadership, corruption and mismanagement of resource have also contributed to the gross under-funding of education.

Culturally, it can be argued that entrepreneurship has been hindered by two major factors: society's perception about the socioeconomic status of artisanship and the value system which is fast being eroded. There is the general perception that artisans and technicians are "never-do-wells", dropouts, societal rejects or even failures that should perpetually remain at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder. However, they form the major sustainer of any economy.

Politically, Lack of Political Will on the side of political leaders have been a more hindrance to entrepreneurship development and reduction of unemployment in Nigeria (Onwubiko (2017). The neglect of vocational/technical education has been robbing the nation of the potential contributions of its graduates to national growth and economic development. The inability of policy makers to adequately address this area has lead underdevelopment of Africa.

Agbeze *al et* (2012), writing on the obstacles of Entrepreneurship Development in Nigeria averred that

the challenges and obstacles facing aspiring Nigerian entrepreneurs include amongst others the following:

Constrained access to local and international markets stunt entrepreneurial expansion and proliferation because Entrepreneurs find it difficult to successfully market and expand their business as a result of high cost of doing business. Enterprises can only succeed if awareness of market availability is created.

Severe infrastructure deficits (mainly of power and electricity) which adversely affect both new and existing businesses. Interestingly, a recent study by the World Bank has revealed that if Nigerian government is able to remove power as a bottleneck, Nigeria will at least gain 30 percent competitiveness in production (Okoye-Nebo, Iloanya and Udunze, 2019). It is therefore imperative that an effective energy policy be developed as business cannot thrive under a bad energy policy.

Inadequate access to finance and the absence of a viable credit policy that addresses the specific needs of enterprises.

Empirical Review

Okeke, Onowu and Ugwu (2020), conducted research on youth entrepreneurship and unemployment in Delta State, Nigeria. The objective of the study was to examine the prospects of technical innovation on youth in the reduction of unemployment in Delta State, Nigeria. The population of the study was 10,000, being the estimated population of youth entrepreneurs in Delta State. However, 370 were sampled. The study made use of the Pearson Product Correlation Coefficient in the analysis of the data generated. The study found that there is positive prospective in technical innovation in reduction of youth unemployment. Also found, is that youth entrepreneurship through creativity has positive influence on youths in reduction of unemployment. This study is similar to the present study, as both study the nexus between youth entrepreneurship and unemployment. The two studies however, differ in terms of the methodology and the population of the study.

Olufemi (2020), carried out research on the topic: Entrepreneurship: An Option to Solving Unemployment Problem among Nigerian Youths. The objective of the study was to examine the role of entrepreneurial education in youth employment. The population of the study was 220 youth entrepreneurs between the ages of 20 and 40 years. The data was collected in Lagos State, Nigeria and analysed using Standard Deviation and the result presented on tables, via simple percentage analysis. The study found among other things that in order to reduce youth unemployment, government- should be consistent in promoting entrepreneurship policy; also that government should tackle the issue of taxation, poor infrastructure and corruption, as they constitute factors that affect entrepreneurship development in Nigeria. This study is no doubt similar to the present study. The two identified entrepreneurship as an option to solving unemployment problem among the youths in Nigeria. They however, differ in terms of the study environments.

Mariana-Cristina (2019), carried out a study on entrepreneurship. a solution to improve youth employment in the European Union. The objective of the study was to examine the correlation between the level of development of the entrepreneurial ecosystem and the level of youth unemployment. The population of the study was 750 youth graduates from different levels of technical and entrepreneurial training. The Pearson Correlation Co-efficient was adopted as a tool of analysis. The finding of the study among other things was that there is negative correction between the level of development of the entrepreneurial ecosystem and the level of youth unemployment. The study therefore, concluded that a

high level of development of the entrepreneurial ecosystem may reduce the level of youth unemployment. This study, except that it was conducted in a different socio-economic environment is very relevant to the present study, and strongly goes to substantiate and give support to the present study.

Acheampong (2018), in his study on: why African youth entrepreneurs are the key to diversified growth, sought to examine the impact of youth entrepreneurship on a diversified economy. The work studied 450 young entrepreneurs from different orientations. It adopted the Multiple Regression Analytical formular. The finding of the study reveals that the youth entrepreneurs in many African countries are responsible for diversifying the economy through entrepreneurship development in mobile technology and agricultural, production. It is also found that through the above feat, there have been tremendous reduction in unemployment among youths, which situation has improved their standard of living.

The finding of this study has nexus to the broad objective of entrepreneurship development, which is to improve the living standard of the entrepreneurs. It is therefore, relevant to the present study. It however, differs from the present study in terms of the objective, as the former borders around the impact of entrepreneurship on the economy generally, but the present relates to the relationship between entrepreneurship and reduction in unemployment,

Carolin, Karon and Claudia (2017), did a study on maximizing the impact of youth. The objective of the study was to ascertain the impact of youth in socio-economic development. The study employed cross sectional analysis of 1500 population drawn across five countries. The study found that many young people find it difficult to obtain a job in the formal sector and often resort to engaging in entrepreneurship. The study therefore, concluded that youth entrepreneurship is a key tool to developing the human capital necessary to advance the future for sustainable socio-economic growth.

This study is important as much as the present study, as both studies point to the importance of youth entrepreneurship, not only in reduction of unemployment, but on the general socio-economic development of any nation. The two studies, however, differ in terms of scope. The former studied five countries, whereas the present study is only in Nigeria.

Theoretical framework

For the purpose of this study, the Schumpeter's Theory of Entrepreneurship was adopted. The theory was propounded by Joseph A. Lois Schumpeter, the father of entrepreneurship research in 1942. The main thrust of the theory is that the function of entrepreneurs is to reform production by taking advantage of innovation or untested technological possibilities for the purpose of making a new livelihood, product or making an old product in a new way; that an entrepreneur is a pioneer who can act with confidence beyond the rage of existing means of living in order to bring about innovation.

The theory associated entrepreneurship with the organization of innovation into business or continuous business development, creating designs in the face of competition and thereby generate income for economic growth and development. It also averred that entrepreneurs are considered the primary agent of economic development and should be encouraged by nations for economic sustainability.

This theory is relevant and most appropriate for this study. This is because it recognized entrepreneurs as the main actors in identifying new opportunities through innovation and entrepreneurship education. These opportunities when well utilized creates market, reduces unemployment and improve the income of the entrepreneurs, as well as raises their standard of living. It _also recognized the abilities and

potentials of the entrepreneurs as people who are confident and can function in a competitive environment to deliver superior competitive advantage. These qualities of entrepreneurs are also well recognized by this study.

Conclusion

This study has carefully, evaluated youth unemployment and entrepreneurship development programme in Ebonyi State, Nigeria; with particular emphasis on the period under review. The specific objectives were as follows; to ascertain the extent to which technical innovation can reduce youth unemployment in Ebonyi State, Nigeria; to determine the extent creativity influences the reduction of youth unemployment in Ebonyi State, Nigeria; and to determine the extent to which entrepreneurship education can induce employment generation among youth of Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

On the course of the study, it was observed that there is high positive prospect in technical education on youth in reduction of youth unemployment in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. It was also found that youth entrepreneurship through creativity has positive influence on youth in reduction of unemployment in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Again, entrepreneurship education has high tendency to induce employment generation among the youth of Ebonyi State, Nigeria, as entrepreneurship education leads to acquisition of technical and innovative skills, creativity abilities, builds self-confidence, high sense of being an achiever, ability to take risks and exploit on the available opportunities, job creation, generation of personal income, awareness of being a job provider than a job seeker. It also improves on the standard of living of the entrepreneurs, as well reduces crime rates. It is therefore, believed that that if the requisite infrastructural facilities are provided h\ government at all levels, and the conducive environments and policies put in place, entrepreneurship will be a sure-bet for reduction of youth unemployment, in Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

Recommendations

From the literature review and the outcomes of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- i. Since there is the confirmation of the awareness of the benefits of entrepreneurship development, governments at all levels and policy makers should as a matter of urgent national importance, redirect its policies towards entrepreneurship development and provision of enabling environments that encourage youth entrepreneurship to productively engage the increasing youth population; to shun crime and improve the economy through technical innovation.
- ii. Creativity should be encouraged and rewarded by both governments and private individuals or organizations. Programmes and forums where the youths are gathered to display their creativity skills should be organized frequently and youths who are able to establish themselves should be encouraged financially.
- iii. The teaching of practically oriented entrepreneurship education should be made compulsory at all levels of education in Nigeria, to inculcate into the learners requisite entrepreneurship skills that will make them self-reliant after graduation and vocational centres outside the schools should be created to accommodate others not in the formal education sector.

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