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Barriers to Graduate Employment and Entrepreneurship in Nigeria

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Abstract

Purpose –This paper investigates the challenges faced by Nigerian university graduates youths, in finding suitable employment or in embarking on entrepreneurship ventures.

Design/methodology/approach –The research investigates the barriers to graduate employment and entrepreneurship in Nigeria starting from the hypothesis that there are other factors besides scarcity of jobs responsible for unemployment in Nigeria. Data from two qualitative research activities were analysed and the results tested, to determine the extent to which the research findings supported the initial hypothesis.

Findings –The findings confirm the researcher’s hypothesis that there are a number of factors, the two main ones being poor government policy and investment in education and low skills and technical incompetence of graduates, which constitute barriers to employment and entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

Practical implications –The findings are clear on the urgency to revisit the Nigerian education and skills curricula and its capacity to facilitate employment and entrepreneurship, and government policy making in this regard.

Originality/value – This study bases its recommendations for addressing Nigeria’s high graduate unemployment on empirical direct engagement with the primary stakeholder that is the Nigerian graduate. It clearly identifies that it is not merely scarcity of jobs but a myriad of factors requiring the urgent attention of both public and private sectors that constitute barriers to graduate employment and entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

Paper type: Research paper

1. Introduction

Nigeria has a high number of young people and is sub-Saharan Africa’s most populous country. It is depending on who is speaking, Africa’s strongest economy, a position which it can be debated, it alternates with South Africa. It has, despite its capacity to diversify,

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continued a policy of mono-dependency on oil which contributes its largest share of income. The country retains a significantly increasing high rate of unemployment; 23.9% as at January 2012 (Nigeria, National Bureau of Statistics, 2013) down to a still high 14.2 % as at January 2017 (Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics, 2017).

The relevance of education to future employment and entrepreneurship in Nigeria remains relatively under-researched, particularly in terms of exploring what those in or out of education perceive as barriers and challenges. Ihugba et al, cite amongst a myriad of factors, “low standard of education” as one of the “challenges faced by entrepreneurs in developing countries.” (Ihugba et al, 2013, p28). However, an empirical investigation into the career intentions of university students who had benefited from a semester course in entrepreneurship found that “entrepreneurship education impacts positively on the career intentions of tertiary education students” (Ekpoh and Eket, 2011, p176).

The researcher’s hypothesis is that there are a variety of factors responsible for poor employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in Nigeria, not just the scarcity of available jobs and; that some of these factors weigh more heavily on the graduate’s ability to gain employment or engage in entrepreneurship, than others. What was missing from the discourse and policy planning measures for addressing graduate unemployment and the low level of sustained entrepreneurship activity in Nigeria was a verifiable and validated body of research on the issue. This research aims to fill this gap. First, it engages with the primary stakeholder, that is, the Nigerian university graduate to assess barriers to employment and entrepreneurship. Second, it identifies the myriad of factors which are barriers that have been previously identified in existing literature and tests the relevance of these factors in the Nigerian context. The results of the research are validated by consultation with other stakeholders including education providers in Nigeria. Fourth, the research results dispel a

common myth that scarcity of jobs alone is the reason for high graduate unemployment in Nigeria and identifies the urgent need for public-private partnership to address these barriers. The results of the research should be invaluable to drafters of education curricula and policy makers as it shows what factors need to be tackled if barriers to graduate employment and entrepreneurship in Nigeria are to be addressed effectively.

To test the afore-mentioned hypothesis, the research project comprised two research activities: Research Activity 1 on Education and Youth Employment (RA1: Ezeani 2011) and Research Activity 2 on Education Employment and Entrepreneurship (RA2: Ezeani 2013). The literature review is set out in Section 2. Section 3 presents an overview of the research framework and the methodology adopted for the research. The results and key findings are presented in Section 4. Section 5 engages in discussion and analysis of the findings and Section 6 reviews the implications for research, practice and society, and limitations of the study. The conclusions are presented in Section 7.

2. Literature Review

Given their limited resources, life and work experience, young people face unique constraints and greater barriers than older age cohorts. (Schoof, 2006, p xii). Studies from the USA for example suggests that “[L]evel of education is the most important factor in identifying entrants into skilled services self-employment; probability of entry rises substantially at each of the higher levels of college education.” (Bates (1995, p151). Later UK research notes that the “typical entrepreneur in the UK is white, male, aged 36 years old and possesses a higher education qualification (SBS, 2002) with over 60 per cent of entrepreneurs in the 25-44 years old age bracket.” (Robertson et al, 2003).

A study into the effect of education on employment success again from the US in the 1990s confirmed that contrary to “the myth of the poorly educated entrepreneur” (Robinson and Sexton, 1994, p143), “a general education has a strong positive influence on entrepreneurship in terms of becoming self-employed and success.” (Robinson and Sexton, 1994, p142).

The body of research dealing with entrepreneurship in emerging economies is on the whole, limited (Bruton et al, 2008; Urban and Ratsimanetrimanana, 2015). However, review of the literature identified two common approaches to solutions for unemployment and support for entrepreneurship. These include the role of government policies and programmes and; the role of education.

2.1 The Role of Policies and Programmes in Promoting Entrepreneurship and Facilitating Employment Opportunities

Previous studies of resource-rich developing countries with a vibrant youth demographic emphasise the problem of skills shortage and other attendant problems with accessing employment for young people: Timor-Leste (Lundahl and Sjöholm, 2009); South Africa (Allais, 2012). Similarly in Nigeria where the economy is hugely dependent on oil, the local capacity for jobs or indigenous businesses in the oil industry is also limited by a skills shortage. In a study of the need for human capital in the oil and gas industries in Nigeria, the authors found that local Nigerian universities are not structured to produce competent graduates for the oil industry at a time when Nigeria should be exporting technically competent professionals. (Ekebafé and Joleto, 2010)

A study of *Banks Creation and Consultants in Nigeria's Job Program* suggests that employment creation can be better attained via a partnership of the private and public sectors.

(Owualah, 1999). Oni (2012) emphasised the vital role of government policies in order to complement the efforts made by the private sector although in Nigeria's case, those policies have not always been successful or sustainable. Most of the programmes were not sustainable due to poor implementation, financing, constant changes in government, and other administrative issues. Incidentally, some of the best early (pre 2008) programmes were of little effect; a study on *Operation Feed the Nation* which was designed to facilitate agricultural entrepreneurship, showed that statistically, there were no significant increases in the use of farm input by programme participant and only mild increases in total land area cultivated by farmers (Uwakah et al, 1980).

Effective government policies to advance entrepreneurship and innovation in SMEs are therefore of importance, not least because young firms can be productive and can engineer employment (Demirgüç-Kunt, 2011). There is indeed, a role for both public and private partnership in this regard. Such partnership can assist in creating a conducive environment for employment opportunities and entrepreneurship by for example, narrowing the information asymmetry between SMEs and financial institutions, and encouraging big firms to support small enterprises (Igwe et al, 2013 p96-97).

Countries especially those who wish to further stimulate economic growth, need to adopt workable policies but to do so in sectors where they stand to have a market advantage. For instance, technological entrepreneurship has become a source of job creation in Korea. It has been found that high-tech ventures systematically supported by the Korean Government achieved a significantly higher level of innovation and job creation than other small firms. (Lee and Gang, 2010). The Malaysian government has also engaged in the development of biotechnology, nanotechnology, photonics, ICT and advanced manufacturing in the country by providing various training programmes. It also promotes and develops new economic sub-

sectors in manufacturing, services and agriculture as a priority in job creation. Hence, job creation has arisen in areas such as environmental management, environmental engineering, pollution minimization, waste management and R&D. As the new sub-sectors in the economy have grown, so has the demand for experts and highly skilled professionals (Malaysia, Ministry of Human Resources, 2006).

What advantages does specific (sectoral) entrepreneurship education or training offer for entrepreneurship and employment? Assan (2012) conducted a case study in Tutume, north-eastern district of Botswana to investigate whether an Entrepreneurial Skills Training project contributed to greater employment in Botswana. The findings noted that the vocational training had led to job creation in the Tutume district and contributed to increased profit-making capacity of youth-owned enterprises. However there were still challenges including: limited domestic market, shortage of subsidies, high production costs, shortage of staff, lack of commitment by some youth entrepreneurs, and low income. The study recommended a refocus on the training towards creativity and innovative thinking; peer assistance; the establishment of retail co-operatives; and target setting and monitoring of projects (Assan, 2012).

While agriculture is a promising sector for job creation (and the participants in our inquiry agreed) in almost all communities across the world where arable land is available and there is a young potentially strong workforce, the right support remains crucial to the development of agricultural entrepreneurial culture in higher education students. (Khayri et al, 2011). The right support can also be successfully utilised at a younger level for example, in secondary school. Results from a study carried out in a Norwegian upper secondary school indicate that entrepreneurship education programmes are able to influence entrepreneurial intentions among children with different social backgrounds and at a young age (Johansen and Clausen,

2011). By contrast, a similar study by Mahadea et al (2011) into South Africa's level of early stage Total Entrepreneurial Activity (TEA) recorded poorer results partly due to skills and resource limitations. However, the study found that if entrepreneurship education is introduced at the secondary school level, South Africa's base for entrepreneurial capacity can be enhanced with more young skilled young people starting up opportunity firms and necessity ventures (Mahadea et al, 2011).

2.2. The Role of Education in Promoting Employment and Entrepreneurship

It has been argued that a huge amount of wasteful government spending is attached to misguided and even pernicious policies on education in the misguided belief that more spending in the sector as opposed to vocational training, guarantees economic success. (Wolf, 2002). Nevertheless, studies on education continually confirm its importance: the early analysis on the effects of education as an institution for society's success (Meyer, 1977); the role of higher education as a stimulus for growth and wellbeing of the individual in society (UNESCO 1991); the role of education as an essential factor in economic development (Ilhan 2001); the relationship between education, society and development in the Caribbean society (Joseph, 2007); and the importance of education in the entrepreneurial process (Arthur et al 2012).

Other projects and studies have examined how effective education is for employment in the global workplace (Playfoot and Hall (2009); the approaches to supporting young people who are not in education (UK) (Nelson and O'Donnell 2012); a review of how to support the future of education for employment and development in South Africa (Chatham House, 2014); and the limited impact graduate turnout has on graduate employment in Nigeria

(Akinyemi S et al, 2014). Surveys on the issues of education and employment by Mckinsey have also examined the factors that inform the design of a suitable system that works to guarantee that young people can move from education to employment. These factors include addressing a critical shortage of skills, the impact of violence in society, the role of government, families, civil programmes etc. in the process, and the fact that half of the youths surveyed were not sure that their post-secondary education had actually improved their chances of securing employment. (Mourshed M et al 2012). A further Mckinsey study undertook a specific focus on how to get Europe's high numbers of unemployed youths into employment. The findings here indicated a number of problems – again the issue of skills shortage, the cost of higher education and the difficulty young people in this part of the world faced when making the transition from education to employment (Mourshed et al 2014).

Most of these studies mentioned considered reports from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the United Nations Educational Social and Cultural Organisation; the consensus is that without the required skill set, young educated people are no more likely to gain good employment easily than their uneducated counterparts can. Entrepreneurship with its greater promise of self-employment and in the long term, employment for others and wealth creation in society is also far-fetched, without appropriate vocational or other training and support including financial support and investment. A report by the Global Business School Network (GBSN) examining the challenges facing the global society identified the shortage of employment and entrepreneurship potential, with the latter being ever more crucial to facilitating employment opportunities in society (GBSN, 2013).

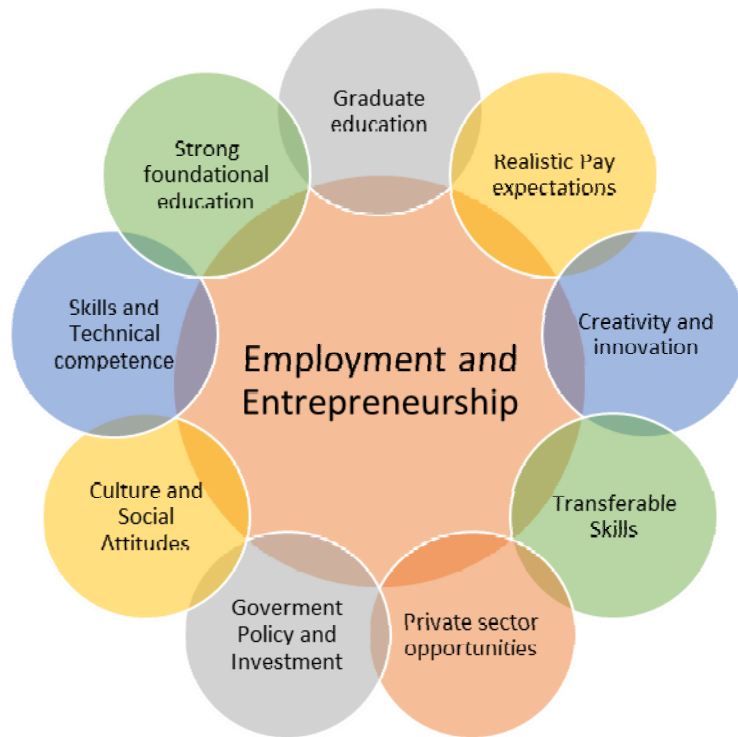
Specific entrepreneurship education has been championed as a necessity for developing countries but research suggests that the nature of entrepreneurship education matters –

transferring “expert” ideas about entrepreneurship training from one society to another do not necessarily yield success. This has been observed in a study on entrepreneurship education in Asia (Dana 2001). A similar view is supported in a review of entrepreneurship education and employment in Nigeria (Akhuemonkhan et al 2013). In addition, another view holds that an important approach to tackling youth unemployment and challenges to entrepreneurship in Nigeria would be supplementing entrepreneurship education with work based training. (Salami, 2013). Salami notes that a targeted approach to capitalise on those sectors that hold more attraction for young people such as telecommunications and technology; a re-orientation of values that divert youths away from the idea of easy money or get-rich quick schemes; and a re-engineered approach to agricultural entrepreneurship would be beneficial to such efforts in the Nigerian context. (Salami, 2013).

3. Overview of Research Framework

There is an overall need to address youth unemployment and stimulate entrepreneurship activity in emerging economies including in Nigeria. However effective policy making must be based on identified barriers which can then be directly targeted in government action and investment, and addressed by educational curricula. Figure 1 below shows those factors which the researcher believes are essential to employment and entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

Figure 1: Essential factors the absence of which constitute barriers to employment and entrepreneurship



Source: Researcher's hypothesis on barriers to graduate employment and entrepreneurship. (Ezeani, 2017).

3.1 Methodology

3.1.1 Samples and data

The key objective of the research was to determine whether the absence of the factors in Figure 1 above are indeed barriers to graduate unemployment and entrepreneurship in Nigeria. The research question sought to find out which of these factors were the least or most relevant, from the perspectives of Nigerian graduates themselves. In order to do this, the research adopted a qualitative approach (Bryman 2015; Silverman 2015; Kothari 2004). It relied on numerical data collated from issued surveys in its analysis. (Maxwell 2010). Two

research activities were carried out. The first, Research Activity 1 (RA1) was a random survey of Nigerian graduates on issues related to Education and Youth Employment. A second survey, Research Activity 2 (RA2) on Education Employment and Entrepreneurship was a purposive sampling of forty-four participants on an MBA programme at the Lagos Business School, Nigeria. Since the focus of the study is on Nigeria, all the research participants in both surveys were Nigerian graduates only. Participation in both surveys was independent and voluntary. Table 1 below shows an overview of the participants from RA1 (2011) and RA2 (2013) respectively.

Table 1: Overview of Participants in Research on Barriers to Employment and Entrepreneurship in Nigeria

	Response Rate	Participants	Identity	Age (Years)	Completion of NYSC Programme	Minimum Qualification	Gender % Male:Female	Identifies Barriers to Graduate Employment and Entrepreneurship?
RA1(July-August 2011)	86.2%	29	Nigerian	25-40	100%	First Degree	N/A	Yes
RA2 (May – June 2013)	100%	44	Nigerian	20-39	100%	First Degree	57:43	Yes

Source: Data from research activity on education and employment (RA1) and; on education, employment and entrepreneurship (RA2) (Ezeani 2017).

Both activities used prepared questionnaires designed on the online survey platform, *Survey Monkey*. The responses for both surveys were designed to be anonymous i.e. individual responses did not bear the subject’s identification. The small scope of the research exercise also meant that a qualitative as opposed to a purely quantitative approach which would require larger numbers of research subjects, was more suitable for the study. (Creswell 2014, p120).

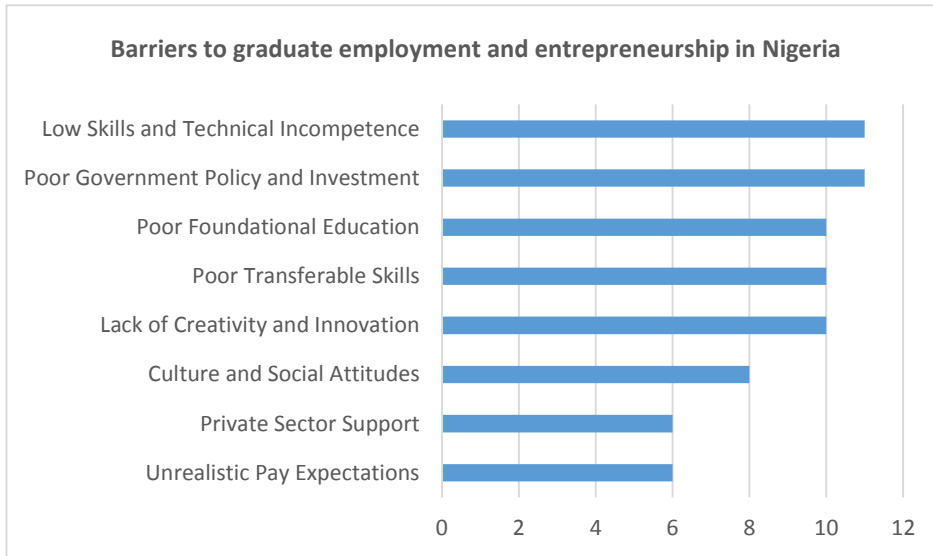
4. Results and Key findings

Closed-ended questions allowed for participants to choose preferred options. Following receipt of responses from each survey, the data was collated electronically to develop a clear picture of the participants' views. Thereafter the collated data from RA1 and RA2 respectively were interpreted by evaluating the similarities between the participants' responses and the initial hypothesis. A comprehensive analysis of the overlapping responses was then undertaken with a view to assessing the weight the participants placed on those nine factors essential to graduate employment and entrepreneurship opportunities in Nigeria.

Graduate education in Nigeria was the common factor amongst participants in both research activities and defined the scope of this study. In Figure 1 the researcher's hypothesis contemplated that the nine factors highlighted were all relevant to graduate employment and entrepreneurship. From interpretation of the data in both RA1 and RA2, the weight placed on the relevance of each factor varied.

From the research findings, the barriers to graduate employment and entrepreneurship in Nigeria have been set out on a simple scale of 0-12, to correspond to their frequency in the participants' responses. 0 indicates the factor found to be least relevant and 12, the factor most relevant. The results of the research are shown in hierarchical order in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2: Barriers to graduate employment and entrepreneurship in Nigeria



Source: Results of research on barriers to graduate and employment and entrepreneurship in Nigeria. (Ezeani 2017).

This result shows that the participants corroborated the researcher’s hypothesis, that there are barriers to employment and entrepreneurship which graduate education alone does not address.

To test the validity of the above results in Figure 2, between 2014 and 2015, the views of some of the participants in RA1 and RA2, and other independent reviewers were further consulted for their feedback on the research findings. These persons were randomly sampled and the results forwarded to them. The independent reviewers’ feedback analysed at least one of the following categories: MBA students not part of the survey, academics and managers in education and training, self-employed persons, entrepreneurs. Like the participants in both research activities these persons were Nigerians, in keeping with the approach of the research. The consulted persons agreed with the research findings. They however emphasised that the greater responsibility for addressing these barriers lay with the Nigerian government. The feedback received proposed that poor government policy and investment was not limited

to government’s inability to fund the education sector. It also extended to the inability of the Nigerian government to provide quality education at all levels from nursery to graduate education, implement policies that support entrepreneurship activities for indigenous entrepreneurs, and reduce difficulties in accessing available jobs in Nigeria.

4.1. Key findings from Research Activity 1(RA1, 2011)

The key findings from RA1 are shown in Table 2 below

Table 2: Key findings from Research Activity 1: Education and Youth Employment (RA1, 2011)

	No of participants	Employed in NYSC placement %	Benefitted from NYSC skills programme %	Top 3 sectors for employment	Bottom 3 sectors for employment	Main barrier to graduate employment	Difficulty getting a job %	Minimum pay expected/month
RA1	29	15%	20%	Private Sector Trade and Business; Banking; Education.	Manufacturing; Oil and Gas; Telecommunication.	Poor government policy and investment	90%	₦100,000 c.\$575

Source: Data from research activity on education and employment (RA1, 2011). (Ezeani 2017).

A transition stage from university to the work place in Nigeria is provided under the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme. Since its creation in 1973, the programme has been compulsory for all Nigerian graduates. However most participants did not want to be employed in their place of service or were not retained by their employers. This raises questions about the effective use of this graduate programme to facilitate employment and entrepreneurship. On questions regarding pay expectations, most of the participants responded that they wanted a much higher wage than the average. None of the participants

thought that a monthly income of less than ₦ 40,000 (c. \$230) was a living wage and yet most employers are likely to offer salaries around this amount.

4.2. Key Findings from Research Activity 2 (RA2, 2013)

The key findings from are shown in Table 3 below:

Table 3: Key Findings from Research Activity 2: Education Employment and Entrepreneurship (RA2, 2013)

	No of participants	Gender/ Male:Female ratio %	Top 3 sectors for entrepreneurship	Bottom 3 sectors for entrepreneurship	Main Barrier to Graduate Entrepreneurship	Considered it difficult to set up a profitable business %	Minimum proposed qualification for employment or entrepreneurship
RA2	44	57:43	Agriculture; Trade and Business; Oil and Gas.	Banking; Education; Professional Services.	Poor management skills.	93%	University degree

Source: Data from research activity on education, employment and entrepreneurship (RA2, 2013). (Ezeani 2017).

RA2 sampled the views of MBA students from the Lagos Business School, Lagos (Pan-African University). When asked whether they intended to set up business alone or with another person after their studies, over 79% of the participants' surveyed answered in the affirmative suggesting that there is a real interest in entrepreneurship amongst the participants. The participants did not consider that Nigeria's educational system adequately prepared the youth for opportunities in employment and entrepreneurship; indeed only one respondent agreed with the suggestion. This is an intriguing finding considering that the participants were all products of the country's education system and in fact, were engaged in studies in a Nigerian institution at the time they were responding to the survey.

Commonly accepted challenges amongst the Nigerian populace such as excessive government bureaucracy, competition, insecurity and even corruption were not considered significant barriers to entrepreneurship. Over 90% suggested that entrepreneurship was a better option for the Nigerian graduate in the future and all the participants were of the view that the **private sector** was best suited to support wealth creation in general.

5. Discussion and Analysis

Since all the research participants had undergone the compulsory National Youth Service Corps Programme, it is useful to provide a brief background on the relevance of the said programme to the research project. In 2011 when RA1 commenced, about 200,000 Nigerians were awarded the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) certificate. (Nigeria, NYSC, 2013). They were the 38th cohort in a long line of young men and women who having completed higher education were mandated under Decree No 24, of 22 May 1973, to serve their country with "with a view to the proper encouragement and development of common ties among the youths of Nigeria and the promotion of national unity" (Nigeria, NYSC, 2013). Yet in RA1, most participants either did not want to be employed in their place of service or were not retained by their employers under the NYSC programme. Why then does this long –running exercise in mobility not translate into successes in innovations, entrepreneurship, job creation?

It is clear both from the low interest in working for the NYSC employer and the apparent disinterest of those graduates surveyed in RA1 in being retained in their NYSC placements, that the NYSC plays a very limited role in bridging the gap between education and employment in Nigeria. This is unfortunate. The focus on national unity in the objectives of

the programme is laudable but limiting. The NYSC programme could equally serve more effectively as a transition phase from the school to the work environment.

The NYSC remains primarily an exercise in geographical mobility for the Nigerian graduate, and it is not always a pleasant experience. The deaths of Youth corpsers caught in the religious themed riots in northern Nigeria and the rising Boko Haram insurgency in the early part of 2013 year is a horrific deterrent to any parent or child thinking of national service. The programme is also narrow in its focus, limiting its engagement with the youth corpsers to a year in which it relies wholly on the scarce availability of jobs in the public or private sector to offer placements to graduates. As the findings from RA1 showed, even where support for entrepreneurship schemes was available, not many graduates knew of them or had benefitted from them.

From the results in RA1, the three sectors selected as offering the least opportunities for graduate employment were manufacturing, oil and gas, and telecommunication. It could be argued that Nigeria may be missing an opportunity in areas of competitive advantage given its young labour force. The participants clearly recognise that these sectors are not accessible to them. For instance, oil and gas is Nigeria's main source of national income yet from the results of the research, graduates are not accessing the sector for jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities. In order to carry out the work of oil exploration, technical knowledge, technology, corporate expertise are conditional to the success of oil exploration activities and all these require human capital whether it is to develop and implement technical expertise, to implement existing, and develop new technology and to facilitate corporate activity and market growth in this area. Nigerian universities must therefore ensure that they are producing graduates with the skill sets required for employment or entrepreneurship

opportunities in the sector. Policy makers must also examine and address the sector's capacity to absorb Nigerian graduates.

The results of both research activities show that there is a concern with the quality of education and skills shortages in Nigeria. There was an almost uniform perception that only university education put an applicant's capacity to gain employment at an advantage. This view suggests there must be intense competition amongst university graduates for the few available jobs, with non-university degree holders at a distinct disadvantage in the employment market. It also suggests that there is a dissatisfaction and perhaps a lack of confidence in post-secondary education similar to the McKinsey findings mentioned earlier (Mourshed et al 2012; 2014). Previous studies have shown that poor infrastructure, poor teaching quality, falling standards are all contributory factors to low quality education in Nigeria (Odia and Omofonman 2007; Duze 2011). Government budgetary allocation has been on the decrease just as constant strikes by school teachers especially at secondary and university level has been persistent. For instance, there has been a severe cut in the education budget from its pre-1970 over 40% of the budget allocation, to 8% in the 1980's and down to its 3% allocation in the 2011 national budget; the actual total was 6% of which 3% was recurrent expenditure (Nigeria, Budget Office, 2011; El-Rufai 2011). In 2013, the Nigerian government however increased the education allocation to 8% of the national budget, (Nigeria, Federal Ministry of Finance, 2013). This is still too little for quality education.

Case studies on entrepreneurship conducted by the RA2 participants' institution, the Lagos Business School (LBS), had previously found that where founders of businesses "possess managerial capabilities, they may provide enough continuity and direction in the company's transition from birth to growth" (Alos and Bamiro 2005, p xxvii). The lack of skills was also identified as a barrier to entrepreneurship in RA2. The researcher noted that while poor

power supply was in the set of options available on this question of barriers to entrepreneurship, it was placed fourth. It is curious that the participants ignored the importance of power supply without which the efficiency and success of 21st century entrepreneurship ventures is in doubt. On the other hand however, as most homes and businesses in Nigeria rely on generators for their power supply, it could be that the participants were only reflecting the realities of the Nigerian business environment with its persistent absence of stable power supply.

The responses to those survey questions evaluating the impact of culture and attitudes on employment and entrepreneurship are also worthy of note. The results in RA1 show that poor government policy and investment are a main barrier to employment. While the participants in RA2 did not place much reliance on the government to create jobs, the participants in RA2 suggested that creating jobs in the society and wealth re-distribution are the two main objectives of wealth creation. Personal satisfaction and making profit for the enterprise were selected as third and fourth, respectively on the list of options, an interesting result from the survey.

The researcher is aware that there is a social welfare dimension to traditional business culture in Nigeria. Enterprises are mainly family owned businesses and businesses typically operate a single leadership model structure. There is therefore in the researcher's view, an inconsistency between the actual culture of entrepreneurship in Nigeria and the responses provided by the participants. This is because the two main factors chosen - creating jobs in society and wealth re-distribution, suggest a social altruism at odds with traditional and pragmatic views of wealth creation in the Nigerian society i.e. to make profit and thus provide for the family. As there was no follow-up on the instant research survey, the root of

this inconsistency between the participants' views and commonly held opinion is not clear. It may be owed to 'Western' or academic theories of entrepreneurship and wealth creation which have been studied by the participants in RA2, in the course of their MBA programme. As Dana (2001) and Akhuemonkhan (2013) cited earlier noted, the transfer of ideas on entrepreneurship from one society to the other may not always be ideal.

6. Implications and Limitations of Study

The findings are clear on the role of the government and the education system to urgently address the barriers that stifle employment and entrepreneurship in Nigeria. There is also an urgency to revisit the role of the NYSC programme and Nigeria's education and skills curricula. The further feedback from those consulted to validate the results and findings of the research project also highlight the need for targeted policies and more effective government investment. Some recommendations include:

Government policy and investment: The Nigerian government has to invest more in the education sector. Policies encouraging local capacity in economically viable areas like agriculture and in the oil and gas sector must also be implemented. The Nigerian government has already made efforts in this regard for e.g. under the *Nigerian Oil and Gas Industry Content Development Act* (known locally as the *Local Content Act*). More needs to be done to ensure there is greater access for job seekers in varied sectors.

The government must also address difficulties in accessing employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. For instance, age and the level of experience are inhibitors to employment in

the Nigerian context. With constant strikes and closures of universities, most Nigerians will spend a longer time in education than their counterparts in other countries. This means that where employers insist on applicants with a long period of experience, such expectations are unrealistic. Government therefore has to step in with policies that can help check that job advertisements do not effectively remove a large number of persons from the potential pool of applicants. There is also a duty on employers who need to adjust their expectations with the reality – most university degree holders may be above the cherished ages of 21-24 and may also lack the technical experience gained by their counterparts in countries where apprenticeships and vocational training are offered as alternatives or alongside university education. Policies addressing the need for constructive apprenticeships even for university degree holders can help address this.

Direct assistance for entrepreneurship ventures could also be by way of policies which reduce tax and administrative rates and facilitate bank or co-operative loans for new enterprises. Efficient public services including power, pipe-borne water, transport, communication and the guaranteed security for lives and businesses are fundamental government support objectives without which the private sector may not be able to grow and develop new ventures as forecast by the participants.

Skills and technical competencies: Education curricula must develop not only cognitive but also technical skills that can ease graduates into the job market. Government policies encouraging social entrepreneurship and supporting youth workshops and projects have to be publicly available especially at school; the results of RA1 suggesting that most of the participants had not benefitted from such programmes is surprising considering the number of such projects identified by the government as previously cited. (Essien 2013). Support in the

form of funding for apprenticeships and vocational learning outfits in crafts, music, arts, science and technology, could also supplement a university education and may provide an alternative means of enterprise for the job seeker. Beyond the component of the degree studies therefore, possessing transferable or social skills which are preferred in a work environment can help overcome barriers to employment. A university education that incorporates those skills “empowering learners” will therefore be an additional benefit (Harvey 2000, p11).

Refocusing the NYSC programme as a clear transition from education to work: The NYSC programme has to be revised. The political objective of national unity does not address the bigger and more urgent need for skilled workers and entrepreneurs. In addition to providing job placements, the programme can also provide support for innovation and skills training for entrepreneurship activity. It must also provide and make young people aware, of funded entrepreneurship opportunities.

Wider education curricula from early year’s education: A wider curriculum can also facilitate more effective foundational education and engender more purposeful entrepreneurship activity. Educating school age children about the resources, challenges and needs of the Nigerian environment can stimulate the student’s understanding on how best to capitalise on these resources, at the point of graduate education and beyond.

Public and Private sector partnership: Other socio-economic measures implied in the participants’ dissatisfaction with the educational system, the lack of infrastructure and lack of support for entrepreneurship etc. also require attention. This will include direct investment into infrastructure: classroom construction and equipment, stocking libraries, laboratories,

and research centres. Also, minimising the high cost of education with subsidised school fees including transparently funded and well publicised scholarship opportunities; the provision of learning support for the disabled, juveniles, and those with learning difficulties. Staffing schools with qualified teachers, who can manage students' expectations with regards to job prospects and salary expectations, encourage talent and entrepreneurship, and in addition, ensure that students learn transferable and social skills as part of their curricula even at pre-university level is also required. Other joint effort between the schools and the private sector can include supporting schools to invite successful entrepreneurs and career professionals including alumni, to speak to students as role models.

Enhanced Culture and Social Attitudes: Graduates have a role to play and an obligation to work towards their own future. Government and the public sector cannot be relied on alone. Expecting high salaries or refusing to take up available employment only means more people remain unemployed and the economy suffers to everyone's detriment. In the absence of strong government support for start-ups, partnerships and co-operative ventures may also be viable opportunities for business initiatives. Pooling finances, resources, and talents together rather than going it alone, may prove of greater benefit especially for high capital intensive opportunities in oil and gas, power supply, etc. There may also be viable opportunities in inventions and innovations, for telecommunications, health and educational services, or to address those business niches existing in the local community.

6.1 Limitations of the Study

Both RA1 and RA2 were limited in scope to the questionnaires issued and the small sample sizes. Some issues arising from the responses to both surveys were not followed up in further enquiry and could be the subject of future study. For instance, a more extensive survey of graduates in order to obtain data on employment destinations following the NYSC programme can provide more information on the successes and challenges in the programme. The study did not explore the impact of issues like gender, learning difficulties, disability, and poverty, on employment and entrepreneurship. Further data and analysis on these issues could also offer a more comprehensive treatment of the barriers to graduate employment and entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

7. Conclusion

“[W]ithout the end-user as a stakeholder, policy responds to the perceived need rather than an actual need.” (European Commission, 2013, p2). The results of the research activities in this study support the initial hypothesis that is, that graduate education is not enough and that there are barriers to employment and entrepreneurship in Nigeria. The results and findings show that these barriers in order of relevance are: Low skills and technical incompetence; Poor government policy and investment; Poor foundational education; Poor transferable skills; Lack of creativity and innovation; Culture and Social Attitudes; Private sector support and; Unrealistic pay expectations. Recommendations that can help efforts at reducing these barriers include: Effective government policy and investment; Incorporating skills and technical competence in education curricula; Refocusing the NYSC programme as a bridge between education and work; Widening education curricula from early year’s education; Public and private sector partnership; and Enhanced cultural and social attitudes. As the results of this study show, a pervasive run of youth unemployment and unsuccessful

entrepreneurship ventures for future Nigerian graduates can only be checked by informed and strategic action on tackling the barriers identified in this research study.

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