
**COPING WITH THE CHALLENGES OF GRADUATE
UNEMPLOYMENT THROUGH APPROPRIATE CAREER
COUNSELLING**

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ABSTRACT

The challenge of graduate unemployment in Nigeria has become a cancerous disease that is seemingly defying treatment. One can sadly notice that educated, capable and active citizens of this country are roaming about the street seeking for job opportunities to no avail. The situation is such that enforced idleness has been created by lack of employment opportunities. This paper believes that the cause of unemployment which include the white-collar job syndrome; the poor attitude of some employers towards employment; the economic decline due to poor orientation to duty, lack of dignity in labour and work study programme as well as high population growth became issues for discussion because of the inadequate career counseling received by job seekers while in school. Consequently; most of the affected individuals are experiencing some social, economic and psychological traumas that require urgent attention. This paper therefore, attempts to propose some appropriate career counseling strategies that can be employed in arresting the situation. Some useful recommendations that will faster the reduction of unemployment in Nigeria have been suggested. While one admits that unemployment cannot be completely wiped out, it is believed that a drastic reduction to a manageable level can be realized if appropriate and professional career counseling is considered.

Introduction

Career counseling has been one of the major aspects of immense concern to scholars of guidance and counseling. Many professional scholars in that field of study have made much publication in books and journals on almost every aspect of career guidance. However, a careful observation of the situation in secondary schools and colleges appears to paint an ugly picture of total ignorance of career development among students. The

scenario tends to show that most of those professional books and journals have found themselves in library shelves with no one to open them. In reality therefore, it appears many school leavers often graduate from schools without appropriate career counseling. Unfortunately, this trend is seemingly having an adverse effect on some university graduates who have chosen courses that may not be relevant in the 21st century world of work. Many university graduates are therefore,

roaming the street today without any assurance of employment.

The question of graduate unemployment is undoubtedly a global phenomenon which is vigorously being addressed by all nations of the world. Until the late 1980s, graduate unemployment in Nigeria was quite strange. The problem of Nigeria before the 1980s was the acute shortage of graduates in all spheres of the economy. Graduates were therefore, faced with the problem of choice from the several available job opportunities. Even when the National Youth Service Scheme was introduced, beneficiaries had gainful employment before the end of the service year. Certainly, the number of graduates from the few

universities at that time was not too high to be accommodated by the private and public sectors of the economy. The massive quest for university education however, led to the establishment of more universities in Nigeria. According to the NDE report of 2007, unemployment was a non issue during the early decades of Nigeria's post independence. Unemployment rate then was below 2% by 1985, the figure rose to a disturbing proportion of 9.8%. The rate is becoming more disturbing in this millennium. The number and percentage of unemployed graduates from tertiary institutions who registered with the National Directorate for Employment in 2007 has been summarized in Table 1.

Table 1:

ZONE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
North West	18,133	9.12
North East	10,964	5.50
North Central	21,791	11.00
South East	15,583	7.80
South West	102,642	51.68
South-South	29,604	14.90
Total	198,717	100.00

Source: NDE (2007) percentage calculated and re-arranged by the author into six geopolitical zones.

As at today, there are 102 legally approved universities in Nigeria (Guardian, 2010). This has therefore raised the enrollment figure from 104 in 1948; 1, 396 in 1960, 40,000

in 1976, 172,000 in 1988, 448,000 in 2000, to over 850,000 in 2010 (Okojie, 2010). On the 18th October, 2000, over one hundred unemployed graduates stormed the front of the

presidential office in Aso Rock, Abuja with a protest, demanding that government should consider their plight by giving them employment (Dabalén and Oni, 2000). Advertisement for employment in any sector today, attracts a mammoth crowd comparable to a political rally or Christian crusade. This is an unhealthy development that must be addressed as quickly as possible.

The major reason for massive unemployment of university graduates in Nigeria is the lack of appropriate career counseling of students at the secondary school level. This paper is therefore aimed at providing the basic career counseling strategies that will help counselors in the process of assisting students make appropriate choices of career.

Conceptual Framework

Career counseling is a contemporary terminology often used in place of the traditional vocational guidance, which was simply interested in the usage of test and tell approach. But career counseling is interested in assisting clients understand that the issue of career is a life long process of development. Moreover, career counseling has become more appropriate so as to remove the confusion people often have on the difference between vocation as a

concept and vocational education as a training (Kolo, 1999).

Traditionally, career is generally seen as one's chosen occupation or profession which he is well trained for, and from where he makes a living. NCDA (1997), defines career counseling as "the process of assisting individuals in the development of a life career with focus on the definition of the worker role and how that role interacts with other life roles". According to Kolo (1999), career is a life long sequence of work, educational and leisure experience. This implies that career refers to the totality of one's activities, hobbies and training that gives him satisfaction throughout life.

Career counseling can be seen as the process of assisting prospective job trainee (students and apprentice) makes useful career decision that may enable him make appropriate career choice or adjustment which will bring about satisfaction throughout his life span. According to Akinade (2005), the purpose of career counseling includes:

Identification of personal preferences exploration of career options, collection and collation of data about careers. Making decisions about careers, implementing, change

from the present situation and assisting with employment seeking or job application issues (p.21).

Unemployment is defined by the Encarta encyclopedia (2009) as "enforced idleness of wage earners who are able and willing to work, but cannot find any job". This paper agrees with definition because emphasis on unemployment must be centered on individuals who are willing to work to earn wages, seeking for remunerative jobs but could not find any. The number of university graduates who have already completed the National Youth Service Scheme this year alone and have not been able to secure any remunerative jobs can attest to this definition because they have both the training and the willingness to work but found none. Microsoft (2009) see unemployment as "joblessness or the condition of having no job". It is clear from these definitions that unemployment does not only emphasize the inability to get work but also the inability to get a remunerative work. Individuals who search for jobs do so for the purpose of satisfying their needs which include food, clothes, shelter, socialization, security, humanitarian services and self-esteem.

Unfortunately, the only remunerative job in Nigeria today is politics. Consequently, unemployed graduates struggle for political offices with vigour, even at the expense of other people's lives. Those who are not fortunate to be tipped to contest any elective position, accept to work as thugs and security agents for rich political aspirants. Okoghenum (2010) report that Larry Fejokwu, who is the African Co-ordinator of the USA-Africa Entrepreneurship Project Team decried the high level of youth unemployment in Nigeria and called for a state of emergency on unemployment. He remarked that "many Nigerian youths now offer themselves to drug barons, political godfathers as thugs, robbers and assassins", international traffickers in human beings for sex trade in several foreign countries. The latest sector that is recruiting these youths for socio-economic and political terrorism is the kidnap industry" (P.23)

This ugly situation is definitely not in the best interest of national development. If graduates were well counseled to see the relevance of professional and vocational courses, they would have probably been self employed and even assist in the employment of other youths. It is in the light of this ugly trend that this paper is strongly advocating for

appropriate professional career counseling, which will assist the ever growing Nigerian youths make appropriate career preferences and choices. Since the public sector appears to be saturated, the need to look inward for gainful career development becomes the ultimate.

Causes of Unemployment

One of the major causes of graduate unemployment in Nigeria is the white-collar job syndrome. The thought of government employment appears to have beclouded the idea of creativity and innovation. The man that the Nigerian society respects and recognizes today is apparently the man who works in the office as a civil or public servant. Most graduates from the universities and polytechnics who, by virtue of their professional training ought to be employers of labour would prefer government services. For instance, it is expected that many of our youths who have successfully graduated from higher institutions as Engineers, Architects, Doctors, Surveyors, Accountants and other professionals should make efforts towards self-employment but the reverse is the case. This is due to the fact that many lack dignity of labour. They do not place worth on anything they could do to earn a living. Many of them would prefer government paid jobs where they can be allocated

elaborate offices and good cars. The feeling that everyone's survival lies in government service, appears to have resulted in mass unemployment, since government resources cannot be overstretched. According to Agbe and Agbe (1999) "the new system of education aims at making Nigerians find more meaning in education and life. We will reach a stage, and very soon too, where our youth will create jobs for themselves and not necessarily roam government offices for which, probably, they were not trained" (P.6.). It is obvious that when professionals become self employed, they will in turn take the position of employers of labour, thereby contributing towards the effort of government at reducing unemployment to a tolerable level.

Closely related to the above, is the attitude of some employers of labour towards employment. According to Dabalen and Oni (2000), there are two contrasting opinions by social analysts regarding the poor attitude of employers towards the employment of university graduates. The first opinion holds that unemployment exists not because there are no vacancies but because most applicants lack basic competencies required for optimum performance, or either very low or non-existent. This view tends to shift the cause of unemployment to the education sector, which failed to

identify the current competencies required in the labour market. The world economy is dynamic and may require new and professional skills in order to meet with the demand of the new millennium. The need for curriculum developers to be very proactive becomes very obvious in the present circumstance. Hence, the need for work study programme in our institutions to equip the undergraduate with professional skills.

The second opinion holds that curriculum developers and the entire educational system should receive little or no blame for the rate of unemployment. The current educational system should receive little or no blame for the rate of unemployment. The critical issue in their opinion is the lack of strong and consistent demand for labour. In other words, vacancies exist in almost every sector of the economy but employers of labour prefer to employ few staff for the purpose of maximizing profit. The resultant effect of such attitude is that the few staff are often overworked and overloaded with responsibilities, which puts efficiency at stake. This paper feels that one way of addressing the attitude of employers of labour, is professional counseling of employers on the proper ways of achieving the goals of their organizations. Prospective

employees equally require counseling for self-employment and professionalism.

Furthermore, the poor orientation of workers towards their jobs is another serious reason for massive unemployment in Nigeria. It is apparent that if government establishment and corporations have expanded with a corresponding increase in income generation, the issue of unemployment would have been well addressed. Unfortunately, there is seemingly a very poor orientation of employees towards their responsibilities. There is the ugly assumption that government job is no one's job; and as such, jobs are handled in a lackadaisical manner. Such inefficiencies and lack of commitment to duties appear to have caused great decline in government establishments. For instance, government owned breweries, cement factories and transport services to mention but a few, have always recorded low output and therefore, could not pay regularly staff salaries. The poor orientation to duty is one of the reasons for the privatization of some of our industries and establishments. Such poor orientation cannot allow for expansion of any establishment. It is obvious that companies and industries are established for profit making. Since no substantial profit is being made in organizations, the

question of employment of new staff would not arise. Rather, the interest of management would be to rationalize or downsize the existing workforce so as to remain alive. Such actions would always result in further unemployment.

The afore-mentioned factors are among the several causes of graduate unemployment in Nigeria. The several social and psychological effects of the ugly situation on the unemployed graduates, their families and the entire nation have become a matter of great concern to everyone.

The Effects of Graduate Unemployment

Undoubtedly, unemployment affects almost every facet of the society which can be categorized into social, economic and psychological effects.

Social Effects

One of the major social effects of unemployment is that it leads to acute poverty. Once an individual has no steady job, he finds it quite difficult to fulfill his obligations to himself and his entire family. For instance, he may be unable to pay the children's school fees unable to settle medical and light bills, unable to take care of the daily needs of the family. Consequently, family cohesion may suffer terribly. Under

such circumstance, divorce and domestic violence may result and social interaction or relationships with friends and neighbours may suffer a serious reverse.

Furthermore, unemployment may result in social deviant behaviours such as thuggery, armed robbery, prostitution (NDE, 2007) theft, acute smoking and drunkenness as well as drug abuse or even other fraudulent practices such as duping, and financial crimes. Many youths who are engaged in political thuggery today appear to be graduates from higher institutions who could not find employment anywhere. They therefore, engage in politics where they are used as instruments for the realization of political dream through coercion. They are used in terrorists threat, arson, intimidation, thuggery and other forms of aggressive behaviour.

Economic

Unemployment may equally affect the economic sector because it may lead to reduced demand for goods and services (Schaefer and Lamin 1998). This implies that the rate of turn over of goods and services by firms and other business organizations depend largely on the rate of employment. When the turnover is reduced the organizations may decide to lay off more workers

which may lead to further unemployment.

It is equally true that the amount of tax and other revenues generated by government and the local communities depend largely on the rate of employment available. When unemployment results, loss of taxes and other revenues may equally result.

Psychological

People who are unemployed usually experience a lot of trauma. Unemployment may result in depression, isolation, loss of self-image, loss of social status, frustration and even aggression. Since a hungry man is an angry man, most unemployed graduates easily show a high measure of aggression in their response to situations. This may account for their involvement in political thuggery, terrorism, threat, arson and intimidation of innocent citizens of the nation.

Suggested Career Counseling Strategies

Career counseling appears to have been handled by people who are not having the competencies to do it. This could account for the regrets many graduates have for the wrong career choices they made in the past. A competent career counselor

therefore, must be a professional counselor with adequate knowledge of career development theories and their applicability; individual and group counseling with a knowledge of when and how to engage in them; must be fully equipped with current information on employment trends and the required training competencies for the various jobs; career planning, changing roles and other computer based career information (NCDA, 1997). He must equally be versed in the factors that influence career choice such as sex, subject combinations, temperaments, interests, individual differences, ability, aptitude, national man power need, ethnic, religious and geographical location (Kolo, 1999; Pope, (2010). The following strategies will be of immense help to a career counselor in the discharge of his duties.

Assessment of Diagnostic Strategy

The assessment of an individual for career development is simply to explore the areas of his strength and weakness. The focus is on every aspect of the individual, the job he intends to do and the society in relation to the intended job (Kolo 1999). Such assessment will clarify many issues and give room for a proper decision making by the individual. Some aspects of the individual to be assessed include his

self esteem, aptitude, cognitive skills, interest, personality type, level of maturity, family background, motives and values. This should be done in relation to the assessment of the current societal demand for the career, the job itself in relation to its objectives, (Kolo, 1999). A careful and processional diagnosis which takes into cognizance the totality of the individual, the intended career and the society, will go assisting the individual into making a realistic decision in his choice of career, which will bring about satisfaction throughout the individual's life. This could be done through observation and interviews.

Information Giving Strategy

A career counselor should have a broad based knowledge and current information of the world of works so that he can accurately disseminate balanced information to his clients. An up-to-date knowledge of careers in relation to societal demands, must be the watchword of career week and talks or conventions (Ipaye, 1983) on the various aspects of career especially in relation to societal demands. Information could be given through the use of career films; captions on the notice boards; career albums, provision of written documents on careers to clients.

Placement Service Strategy

In view of the fact that many workers enter job with little or no knowledge and current information of practical involvement job, it is expedient to occasionally expose prospective job seekers or clients to the physical operation of the jobs they aspire to go into. Such exposure will afford them the privilege of making independent decision, suggestion is borne out of the assumption that the theoretical aspects of most professions, which are learn in class are obviously different from the reality. Some students are often carried away by the sweetness of what they learnt in school to take a decision, which may be regrettable in future. But when they are physically exposed to work environments, they are likely to make better decisions that will help them satisfactory throughout life.

Some practical placement strategies necessary for this millennium include:

- i. Career tours to work environments like the Marine Industries, Cement Factories, Dams, Courts, Hospitals, Cyber Café, Banks, Airports, Seaports, Construction Companies, Bakeries, Food Processing Companies, Eye Clinics, Radio and Television

Stations, to mention a few. Such tours could give them the privilege of not only seeing the practical operations of workers but also the privilege of interacting with managers of those establishments on every aspect of their operations.

- ii. Career fairs, where prospective job aspirants and employers of labour can have the opportunity of interacting freely and intensively on all aspects of the job. Such discussion can be centered on the expectations, opportunities, incentives and hazards or risks of the job. With such exposure, the prospective job aspirant will compare the information with his personal characteristics and take a useful decision.
- iii. Industrial training for all professional trainees, which provides that a certain period of a student's training or educational pursuits is set aside for a practical training on the job. Students are sent to various establishments where the practical aspects of their training is being done. Independent decision or make career adjustment while still in training. It is worthy of note that most students in the pure sciences as well as a

computer science in universities are already involved in the programme. This paper is of the opinion that it should be applicable to all other disciplines especially in the social and management sciences.

Conclusion

It is no longer news that the levels of graduate unemployment in Nigeria is increasing by the day. With the high quest for university education by the teeming youths, the question of unemployment may appear to have come to stay. However, the canker worm can be brought to a halt if all hands are on deck. This calls for a vigorous war against graduate unemployment (WAGU). Graduates could be assisted with the aforementioned recommendations to get out of their predicaments. Exposing students to proper career counseling will go along way to reducing the over dependence on government for employment. The need to boost vocational and technical education has become more imperative in this dispensation where existing vacancies in public and private establishments appear to be too slim to accommodate the teeming unemployed graduates. Students should be encouraged from the beginning to consider self-employment as a plausible option

because government establishment is already saturated.

Recommendation

Having carefully outlined the social, economic and psychological effects of graduate unemployment, the following recommendations have been made as plausible measures that may foster the reduction of unemployment in Nigeria.

Career Awareness or Sensitization

Common knowledge holds it that individuals derive more satisfaction when they make realistic career choices. Exposing students or prospective employees to the present reality of the world of work therefore, becomes a necessary task that must be done. It requires a sensitization on the different job opportunities available, appropriate training and skills for such jobs; aptitude, personality and hobbies necessary throughout life for such jobs. Sensitization could be done by professional career counselor and institutional management through conferences, seminars, and workshops (Ogah, 2000). Parents and teachers equally require much sensitization because, in most cases, they influence the choice of career of their wards for economic, social or political motives. They need to be encouraged to allow their words for

independent choice of careers that may bring eternal satisfaction to them.

Equipping Career Counselors with Modern Career Development Theories

There is no gain saying the fact that human behaviour and the circumstances that prompt certain behaviours, differ from one individual to other. It is therefore pertinent that career counselors should equip or arm themselves with appropriate modern career theories that will enable them assist individual with career difficulties; arrive at the understanding and solution to their problems. Some of the theories include trait and factor or matching theory, decision theory, situational theory, personality theory and developmental theory to mention a few (Agbe & Agbe, 1999). Career counselors are needed now than ever in our educational system.

The Need for Curricula Change

Recent changes in the world system appears to have shown that certain courses are no longer relevant. Some courses seem to be dead-end courses which have little or no relevance to the economy. The urgent need to review the school curriculum to meet with the present economic reality becomes very pertinent. If training is

directly related to the industrial demands of the present dispensation, the question of unemployment due to inadequate training (Schafer & Lamin 1999) becomes history.

Self Employment

Without doubt, it has become obvious that government alone cannot be saddled with the responsibility of employing the teeming number of graduates in Nigeria. This paper suggests that professionally skilled graduates be encouraged through the National Directorate for Employment to be self-employed and to grow into becoming employers of labour.

Entrepreneurship Education

This paper suggests that all universities in Nigeria should include a compulsory entrepreneurship education in the curriculum. Since vacancies in public and private sectors have become very limited, a proper training in entrepreneur may go a long way to helping graduates not to rely solely on government paid jobs but seek ways of becoming employers of labour. Other universities are encouraged to take cue from the bold step taken by the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Agriculture, Makurdi, and the University of Mkar towards this laudable programme.

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