

Refocusing public universities for youths skill acquisition toward combating unemployment challenges in Nigeria

Ojule LC, Osaat DS

Department of Educational Management, Faculty of Education, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Abstract

This article is on refocusing public universities for youths' skill acquisition toward combating unemployment challenges in Nigeria. Government has a responsibility to be sensitive to issues that may constitute threats to peace and national security. Absence of peace in a polity is invitation to anarchy. Raising armies of unskilled youths that are not employable is an indirect way of inviting restiveness, joining religious extremist groups, stealing, pilfering, armed robbery, kidnapping, militancy, cultism, etc. Skill acquisition on the other hand referred to as entrepreneurship education, is not about generating ideas or making money but having entrepreneurial thinking, attitudes or mindset that emancipate one from not just being a burden to the society, but contributes toward its development and survival, offers students the transversal skills which increase their employability rate and most importantly imbue them with the capacity for imaginative thinking, is the answer to unemployment challenges that our university system must be refocused to address. The concepts of refocusing public universities, unemployment challenges, justification for refocusing public universities, entrepreneurship education (skill acquisition), Managing entrepreneurship education in a refocused university system were discussed. The article equally featured resources and strategies required in refocusing university system conclusion and recommendations on refocusing public universities for youths' skill acquisition toward combating unemployment challenges in Nigeria.

Keywords: refocusing, public universities, youth, entrepreneurship education/ skill acquisition, unemployment challenges

Introduction

University education started in Nigeria as a public sector project aimed largely at producing personnel to fill positions in the public service particularly to replace the colonial officers upon their departure after independence. Higher education started in Nigeria with the establishment of the Yaba College in 1932 to provide will qualified assistance in medical, engineering and other vocations as well as teachers for secondary schools. The college eventually offered sub-degree courses in engineering, medicine, agriculture and teacher training, was meant to fill specific vacancies in the colonial administration.

Agitation for the expansion of opportunities for higher education compelled the colonial government to set up the Elliot Commission in 1945 which consequently recommended the establishment of a university college in Nigeria, based on the fact that the need for educated Africans in West Africa far outstrips supply, present and potential (Ramon – Yusulf. 2019). Suffice to say that this led. to the establishment of university college Ibadan in 1948. By 1949, technical education was added to meet the emerging requirements of commerce, industry and the society in general.

Consequently, a College of Arts, Science and Technology was established in each of the regions. Zaria (1952), Ibadan (1954), and Enugu (1955). Accordingly, these were to provide technical education qualitatively different in character from university education as well as professional disciplines such as Secretarial Studies, Land and Estate Management, Teacher Certificates, Accountancy, Administration, Pharmacy and Engineering, leading to the award of diplomas (Raymon-Yusuf, 2019) ^[24].

The perception of Nigerian universities as knowledge-

generating institutions are expected to drive the mechanism for skills acquisition that will result to job creation aimed at poverty eradication and economic development. Ramon-Yusulf (2019) in tandem with this thought observed that the impact of internal and external forces necessitate constant re-assessment of the performance and transformation of universities. He further observed that. through the ages, universities as human institutions have been characterised by changes induced by the demands of the societies, which they serve. Universities have undergone transformations in structure and processes in response to forces prevalent at different times during the course of their history.

University among other higher education institutions has been credited for taking lead in imparting vocational skills among youths in socio-economic development. Akpomi and Ikpesu (2020) ^[3] observed that university entrepreneurial role has been and still an appropriate response to countries multi-dimensional development challenges of unemployment and underemployment, low human capital index and geopolitics. Given the complexities of the Nigerian society in terms of demographics, mono-economy, socio-cultural and religious conditions, the challenges of unemployment, regional agitations, insecurity, armed bandits, militancy, etc, the need to refocus public universities to address unemployment, among other challenges cannot be over emphasised.

Refocusing Public Universities

Vocational.Com Dictionary defined refocus as “adjust the focus of (e.g. a system, function, practice, attention or resources on something new or different). To refocus implies reprioritizing goals, issues or change, one's priorities or re-examine one's priorities to current situation

or challenges that are surmountable within one's area of jurisdiction or calling, with provision of pertinent resources. Refocusing public universities for youths' skill acquisition toward combating unemployment challenges in the context of the adduced definition means, refocusing efforts on programme specifically designed to equip all youths with prerequisite skills to enable them adjust, engage in productive ventures and like earning incomes, become employers of labour as well as imparting such skills to other interested youths. It also implies reaching out to youths not formally enrolled to pursue a degree programme, but in all undeserved communities to guarantee every Nigerian youth has one form of life earning skills. to combat consequences of idolness and unemployment. Channelling and devoting aspect of system's resources (i.e. human, material, financial, entrepreneurial and knowledge inoculation) over how to combat youths' restiveness, violence, insecurity and threats occasioned by idolness and rising unemployment in the society, also connotes refocusing university system.

It is a move to show intellectual prowess or adding value to other areas in the society requiring urgent attention but, not derailing from its core mandate. Refocus according to Marriam-Webster.Com Dictionary, means, "to change the emphasis or direction or narrative". In the context under review, it implies public universities should refocus their intellectual prowess, energies, capacities, resources toward training Nigerian youths with relevant socio-economic skills to ameliorate unemployment challenges.

In an on-line article, Nigerian Tribune (2020) ^[14] titled "Makinde wants Nigeria's tertiary education refocused to produce more job creators", the governor of Oyo State, Seyi Makinde, has asked that education in Nigeria be refined and rechanneled towards producing entrepreneurs and not just job seekers. He observed that citadels of learning in Nigeria turn out hundreds of thousands of youths as graduates yearly, but that they end up chasing shadows in course of searching for jobs. He made above comment as a special guest of honour at the opening of a five-day national train-the-trainer workshop titled "Outcome-Oriented Entrepreneurship Education in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions", which was organised and jointly hosted by the University of Ibadan Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETEL), Centre for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CEI), and University of Ibadan Business School (UISB).

From the angle of solving myriads, of unemployment challenges in Nigeria's society, the governor also observed that, "Entrepreneurship does not only entail starting a business and making money, but a special way in which people are creative, innovative and try to solve myriads of problems that emanate from our ever-dynamic society by creating value additions".

On the importance of youths' roles and contribution to the society, Makinde stated that, "youths in the country have roles to play by renewing and refreshing the current status of the society in terms of leadership, creativity and innovations". In similar vein, Prof. Idowu Olayinka who chaired the conference in his address, emphasised that entrepreneurship education (i.e skill acquisition), which is the philosophy of this article, offers students the transversal skills which increase their employability rate and most importantly imbue them with the capacity for imaginative thinking.

Unemployment Challenges

According to Marriam-Webster Dictionary, "Employment" means "the state of not having a job", being unemployed. A challenge is something new and difficult which requires great effort and determination. It will amount to great insensitivity in ignoring high level of unemployment rate in Nigeria and its implications among our teeming youths. Engaging our youths in prerequisite socio-economic skill orientation will address issues of threat to peace and national security. Gainful employment is imperative for sustainable development.

According to Plecher (2020) ^[23], unemployment has become a major problem bedevilling the lives of Nigerian youths, causing increased militancy, violent crimes, kidnapping, restiveness and socially delinquent behaviour. Without fear of contradiction, youth unemployment is devastating to both the individual psychologically and economically. Ajufo (2013) ^[2]

Equally observed that youth unemployment is becoming an increasingly troublesome issue in many parts of the world. That in Nigeria it has become one of the most serious socio-economic problems confronting the country. Awogbeule and Iwuamadi in Ajufo observed from the excerpts of statistics obtained from the National Manpower Board showed that Nigeria has a youth population of eighty (80) million representing 60 percent of the total population of the country. Sixty four (64) million of them are unemployed, while one million six hundred thousand (1.6) are underemployed. Still on the problems of unemployment, Ajufo also stated that it was causing frustration, dejection and dependency on family members and friends, who also have their own problems to contend with, among our youths.

In the contemporary, there have been notable adverse social, economic and political developments in Nigeria, a consequence of youth unemployment and underemployment, particularly exemplified by increasing militancy, violent crimes, kidnapping, restiveness and political instability. The Nigerian situation is further compounded by the recent global financial crisis that has crippled businesses and the prospect of securing jobs for young people (Fanimu & Olayinka, 2009). Adejumola and Tayo-Olajubutu (2009) in this line of thought noted that unemployment has been identified as one of the major causes of social vices, including armed robbery, destitution, prostitution, political thuggery, kidnapping and many more. According to Economic Commission for Africa in Ajufo (2013) ^[2], stated that because of increase in crime rates, the attraction of foreign investors and foreign direct investment will be drastically reduced.

Ajufo (2013) ^[2] also opined that crime may be a consequence of unemployment as well as an additional factor causing youth unemployment through its negative effects on the economy. Explaining from this perspective, that when crime affects the economy, it increases the cost of doing business for the private sector and providing public services. Resources the state would otherwise channel to other critical sectors of the economy for increased output and funding such as agriculture, education and health, would be diverted to fighting insecurity. Youth unemployment poses a big risk to Nigerian society, if no corrective measures and initiatives are taken, could be disastrous for the nation. It has both national and global

impacts as highlighted from authors whose works were reviewed. Desperation could drive youths into lawlessness in order to survive and as a means of expressing dissatisfaction at the apparent neglect of their very existence.

Oladele, Akele and Oladunjoye (2011) ^[21] identified the following but not limited factors responsible for unemployment in Nigeria, they include:

- Factor of population growth – Nigeria has continued to experience population rate of population growth. This increasing population growth has produced an overwhelming increase in the size of the working age population.
- Lack of employable skills due to inappropriate school curricula – is another factor contributing to the rising youth unemployment. Many graduates in Nigeria lack entrepreneurial skills to facilitate self-employment.

Musari (2009) ^[16] on youth unemployment situation in Nigeria found that about 4.5 million enter the labour market every year without any assurance of securing employment. One is not left in doubt that this ugly situation has left the youths in a vicious cycle of poverty that daily erodes their self-confidence and bright future.

Justification for Refocusing Public Universities–its Importance

The dynamic nature of a given society and the influence of both internal and external forces necessitate constant re-evaluation of the goals, performance and productivity and transformation of a nation's university system including other tertiary institutions established to meet national needs. Ramon-Yusuf (2019) ^[24] in this line of thought observed that:

Through the ages, universities as human institutions have been characterised by changes induced by the demands of the societies, which they serve. Universities have undergone transformations in structure and processes in response to forces prevalent at different times during the course of their history. The national government through its policies and programmes can intervene in the operations of the university. Global forces such as those induced by market, developments in ICT and the demands of a global knowledge economy also bear on university functions pp. 8-9.

The author equally listed students demand for value-for money accountability concerning return on investment, global ranking of universities among others, constitute forces that instigate reforms and system refocusing.

A perusal from the stated expectations of university education as enunciated in the National Policy on Education (NPE) (2014), highlighted the aims of university education in Nigeria as follows:

1. To contribute to national development through high-level relevant manpower training;
2. To develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
3. To develop the intellectual capacity of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
4. To acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;

5. To promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
6. To forge and cement national unity; and
7. To promote national and international understanding and interactions.

Compelling factors necessitating refocusing of public universities for youths skill acquisition toward combating unemployment challenges is quite germane and in tandem with items i, ii, iii and iv of Nigeria's university goals. The population of Nigeria today is about 200 million compared to what it was in 1991 of 88, 992, 200 and 2006 of 140, 431, 790 census respectively (Source: National Population Commission in National Bureau of Statistics (2013:18).

Societal development and advancement in all over the world today is championed by universities through teaching and research efforts. Peretomode (2008) ^[22] referred to higher education as “basic pillars” for achieving development and improving the capabilities of young people and preparing them for the future. The goals of higher education as stated in NPE alluded to this when it included inculcation of proper values for individual survival, development of physical and intellectual skills, among others. Akpomi and Ikpesu (2020) ^[3] argued that the national policy on higher education have been largely determined by theoretical knowledge. That the conceptual knowledge has been assumed to promote take-the-job mentality rather than entrepreneurship and creativity. They observed that the unfortunate orientation has led in recent times to massive graduate unemployment and underemployment in Nigeria. Dangana in Akpomi and Ikpesu in a study by Federal Ministry of Education (FME) found that 53% graduates were unemployed, 30% graduates underemployed and insignificant 3% owners of business, while whopping 69% stated lack of jobs as reason for their joblessness. According to the dual authors' work under review, stated that “the intellectual capital of this nation fundamentally resides in the philosophy of entrepreneurship.

On the relevance of entrepreneurship programmes in tertiary institutions, Prof. Akin Odeunmi, Director for Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETel), university of Ibadan in an on-line article, Nigerian Tribune (2020) ^[14] observed that while the relevance of entrepreneurship programmes in tertiary institutions is not in doubt, suggested that there was an urgent need to further inject the programmes with more practice-oriented contents “which are derived from a deep blend of theoretical knowledge and field-shuffled, success-shaped experiences that have survived miles of entrepreneurial adventures”.

The philosophy for refocusing public universities in Nigeria is to promote entrepreneurship (i.e skill acquisition) growth among our youths which are not limited to the ones enrolled as undergraduate students. Other youths who for one reason or the other could not be enrolled in any of the tertiary institutions should also be captured in the programme. It is hoped this would solve global challenges of the 21st. Century, building sustainable development, creating jobs, generating renewed economic growth, advancing human welfare, promoting national security, self-reliant, reduction in violent and militant activities. Justifying the need for entrepreneurship education in our tertiary institutions, Angel Cabrera in Akpomi and Ikpesu (2020) ^[3] stated thus:

only by letting thousands millions of entrepreneurs try new

ideas, to innovate, to create businesses that put those ideas to work in a competitive and open way, only by doing those things are we going to be able to tackle some of the world's big problems p. 85.

Investment in human capital through entrepreneurship education (skill acquisition) for all Nigerian youths, will greatly ameliorate the ugly narrative that Nigeria is the poverty capital of the world. Mass entrepreneurship programme for the youths would likely change this picture and narrative of our nation. Skills acquisition lead to job creation which eventually will result to poverty eradication and alleviation in the society. Refocusing public universities holds the key that will unlock the potentials of our youths, channel their energy into productive ventures, through all stake Holders determination to implement entrepreneurship education. Okebukola (2011) ^[19] supported the inclusion of entrepreneurship education in national education system enunciates four fundamental of its importance to include:

- Increase potency to contribute to national economic development;
- Reduce global poverty index amongst comity of nation states;
- Creation of employment, increase standard of living and enhanced quality of lives, and
- Improve public perception, respectability and relevance of Nigerian universities.

Entrepreneurship Education (Skill Acquisition)

Entrepreneurship which is all about skill acquisition, is a kind of education that is fashioned out to prepare youths as learners for innovative inventions, which lead to self reliance, economic emancipation and employer of labour. Entrepreneurship plays distributive roles of entrepreneurship education in individual and collective development capacities. It is not about generating ideas or making money but having entrepreneurial thinking, attitudes or mindset that emancipate one from not just being a burden to the society; but contributes toward its development and survival. Entrepreneurship education is all about the activities that aim to foster entrepreneurial mindsets, attitudes and skills which encompasses variety of aspects such as idea generation, start-up, growth and innovation (Santos, Costa, Meumeyer & Caetano, 2016) ^[25].

Refocusing public universities for youths' skill acquisition (i.e entrepreneurship education) toward combating unemployment and its challenges, is quite in tandem with government plans to develop entrepreneurial education for young graduates and youths' employment. Ezeugbor and Nwachukwu (2009) ^[9] alluded that government entrepreneurial policies and programmes aim at empowering people and improving their social service delivery as well as reducing unemployment rate, thereby fostering economic growth in the country. Amadi (2017) equally observed that:

... In the early 2000s, records have it that entrepreneurial education programme were introduced into the Nigerian educational system especially in higher institutions as a mandatory course. The Centre for Entrepreneurship Development (CED) popularly known as the Institute for Entrepreneurial Development Studies (IEDS) which has the objective of teaching and encouraging students in higher institutions to acquire entrepreneurship/business development, entrepreneurial education, financial education,

business support services and opportunity hub; all summed into entrepreneurial, innovative and management skills, was established (p.5).

The importance of entrepreneurship education at the tertiary education level in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised. The Presidential directive in 2005 to the National Universities Commission (NUC), National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) and National Board for Business and Technical Education (NBBTE) for inclusion of entrepreneurship in the curricula, marked the evolution of university transition among other tertiary education institutions. Accordingly, entrepreneurship has been adopted as a major policy intervention in higher education, it is a mandatory multi-disciplinary learning experience for all Nigerian undergraduate students. The essence of entrepreneurship in universities and other allied institutions targets change in students' mindsets to produce responsible enterprising citizenry; equip them with productive skills for creating wealth generating enterprises (Akpomi – Ikpesu, 2020) ^[3]. They also observed that entrepreneurship education engenders creativity and creative mindsets as catalysts for new ideas, new enterprises and new products, discovery of new markets and creation of employment opportunities for contributing to economic growth.

Kofarmata (2014:144) stated that the Presidential Committee set up by the government directed all universities through NUC to implement National Council of Education resolution to:

- Develop action plan for the integration of entrepreneurship education in all higher education institutions
- Create awareness among all stakeholders
- Develop local instructional resources and case studies
- Establish entrepreneurship development centre to serve as laboratory for practical training
- Provide operational guidelines for the centre
- Seek for non-state funds to support the efforts of TETFund
- Development of entrepreneurship curriculum and training modules
- Train the trainers of entrepreneurship courses
- Capacity building of programme coordinators, teachers and managers of Entrepreneurship Programme Centres (EPC).

Entrepreneurial policy intervention according to Akpomi and Ikpesu (2020) ^[3] became a key driver of the university transition. That it marked the era of gradual transformation from their traditional role to the culture of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs. Suffice it to stress at this point that this solid foundation laid therefore serves as the basis and justification for refocusing our public universities now in order to assist combat unemployment challenges in Nigeria. Kofarmata (2014:45) outlined the following objectives of entrepreneurship education to include:

- Actualizing the presidential directives
- Inculcate the spirit of entrepreneurship mindsets among the students of our tertiary institutions
- Promote research development, product development, technology innovation and inventions in our tertiary institutions, commercializing, patenting and acquisition of technology.
- Establishment of entrepreneurship development centres

in all tertiary institutions with view spinning-out micro and medium enterprises.

- Reduce drastically youth and graduate unemployment, raising new generation of entrepreneurs who are job creators for achieving sustainable economy.

It is instructive that public universities supervised by NUC should critically re-examine the system organizational structure, governance and leadership to pattern these areas to reflect entrepreneurial role required of them in a refocused system. Objectives of entrepreneurship education should guide the system's regulatory agency, management and boards established for this purpose to develop, benchmark minimum academic standard and training modules, articulating guidelines for designing entrepreneurial curriculum in tertiary institutions.

On the types and areas of study in entrepreneurial education programmes in public universities, Okozor (2001) [20] indicated that they ranged from agriculture and some vocational programmes such as fashion designing, fish production, catering, event decoration/management, piggery, snail production, clay pots designing, among others. As it affects the required period to accomplish the training and certification of participants, Ekpoh and Edet (2011:174) maintained that, "the duration of entrepreneurial education courses in universities and entrepreneurial centres is dependent on the curriculum of such programme which is further dependent on the category of the programme offered".

The justification and appropriateness to refocusing public universities for youths' skill acquisition toward combating unemployment with its attendant consequences is quite in tandem with the stance of NUC as captured by Nwinkina (2016) [18] who observed that since NUC's directive to universities to provide entrepreneurship education to their students, many universities have begun to establish policies, programme and to mount structures for entrepreneurship education. Ezeugbor and Nwachukwu (2009) [9] observed that government entrepreneurial policies and programmes aim at empowering youths and improving their social service delivery as well as reducing unemployment rate and fostering economic growth in the country. The justification for involving our public universities as intervention mechanism to ameliorate and combat unemployment challenges through entrepreneurial education programme among other laudable government policies and programmes on youth empowerment, cannot be over emphasised.

Managing Entrepreneurship Education (Skill Acquisition) in a Refocused University System

Public universities are educational organisations set by law establishing them with set out goals. As an organisation, it is led and managed by appointed officials like the Vice Chancellor, Governing Council, Senate, etc. Management is an organised endeavours deliberately performed by leaders to obtain effective acquisition, allocation, and utilization of human efforts and physical resources for the purpose of accomplishing organizational goals (Dangana, 2014). Management is seen as the cornerstone of organizational effectiveness (Peretomode & Peretomode, 2008) [22]. Education at the tertiary level develops the skills that generate an entrepreneurial mindset thereby preparing future leaders for solving more complex problems (Akpomi &

Ikpesu, 2020) [3]. They see entrepreneurship as the engine fueling innovation, employment generation and economic growth. In this context, a refocused university system for youths' skill acquisition amongst its other traditional functions, should be managed also to positively affect the economy through innovation and relocation of talents.

Effective management is therefore crucial to refocusing the system toward combating unemployment challenges. Entrepreneurship education planned and executed in public universities without fear of contradiction, will definitely ameliorate unemployment among the youths in Nigeria. There is a growing recognition among governments and international bi-and multi-lateral organizations that as jobs become scarce, youth entrepreneurship becomes an important strategy for integrating youth into labour markets thereby addressing unemployment challenges. Akpomi and Ikpesu (2020) [3] opined that:

The management aspect of entrepreneurship education is the holistic approach to its implementation adopted in universities. There is no unique approach but a variety of ways entrepreneurship in higher education could be managed. Several approaches of infusing entrepreneurship and its implementation could be inferred from some practices across the globe p.86.

Effective implementation of entrepreneurship in public universities would require involvement of multi-stakeholders – private Entrepreneurs, Small and Medium Entrepreneurs, Non-government Organizations Multi-National Corporations, Governments, High Ranking World Universities, etc, to drive the policy. Education policy makers in the training of our youths for skill acquisition for socio-economic empowerment, must be followed with effective government management policy to address issues of entrepreneurship education and management.

The importance of collaboration among critical stakeholders in university education is pivotal in refocusing the system for creativity and nation building. Ramon-Yusuf (2019) [24] posited this view while delivering a lecture to Trinity University, Yaba – Lagos, titled "Refocusing the Nigerian University System for Creativity and Nation-Building". The guest speaker stated that universities must be strategic to carryout effective teaching-learning, research and community engagement, that will help Nigeria to be truly on her way towards technological and socio-economic development, self-sufficiency, poverty reduction, wealth creation and global competitiveness. He added that any meaningful attempt at refocusing university education for creativity and nation-building should have as its backdrop the skills and competence requirement dictated by the future of jobs as technologies can drive business growth, job creation and demand for specialist skills. Public universities as citadel of learning are institutions basically established to equip people with desirable knowledge, skills, attitudes, competences and values through quality teaching, thus creating effective and desired change agents and value-adding organizations of Nigerian society.

Success of a refocused public universities to mid-wife mass entrepreneurship education to benefit Nigerian youths is a function of effective organization and management. Approaches and key success factors of entrepreneurship education must be properly articulated in terms of: What are the things to be taught; who are those to be involved in the teaching; how or which methods, strategies to teach and,

where to teach (i.e. environment) and evaluate entrepreneurship to enhance students' learning outcome. Entrepreneurship Development Centres established in public universities could be managed through any of the two models of Direct Management and Committee System. It is required that the V.C. after due consultations with other stakeholders in university administration, should appoint a seasoned academic with industry and entrepreneurial background, to manage and co-ordinate the centre. Akpomi & Ikpesu (2020) ^[3] maintained that any staff appointed as a Centre Director, must be strategic thinker and be passionate about entrepreneurship who effectively integrates institutional peculiarities in policies, decision making and management of the centre.

Resources (human, material/equipment and finance) are required to achieve purpose of a refocused system. Both high and middle trained manpower in all areas of skills must be hired. Existing infrastructures such as laboratories, workshops, equipment and classrooms must be expanded. Mobile workshops and laboratories on wheel must be procured. Salaries and allowances must be paid to staff personnel engaged in the programme. Equipment and laboratory workshops maintenance cost must be set aside to guarantee efficiency, effectiveness, functionality and continuity of the programme.

In order for the system's skill acquisition centres otherwise referred to as entrepreneurship complex to stay organised and gain focus, they must have some sort of productivity programme system in place to evaluate themselves in terms of set goals. Set goals could be measured in terms of knowledge outcome on organised test and examination from the participants within a given period specified, their competences and performances to attract certification in their respective chosen skills. There must be a well-designed programme in form of curriculum as obtains in all educational institutions, for each area of skill knowledge such as – welding and fabrication, mason and brick laying, painting in decoration, event management and decoration, beauty salon and hair styles making, snailing, electrical installation and maintenance, electronics maintenance/repairs, fishery, etc.

Duration for every skill acquisition area approved in the centre, must be indicated before commencement of the programme and subsequent certification. Certificate should be issued by the university on satisfactory completion of each programme (skill) requirements for employment. Items participants are required to come along with in the chosen skill area must be indicated in the prospectus. Code of conducts and guidelines for all participants must be spelt out, including punishment for offenders to instil discipline and seriousness. Collaboration in funding is a prerequisite for effective functioning of skill acquisition centres. The three-tiers of Government, Non-Governmental Organisations, Philanthropists, Development Partners, World Bank, Entrepreneurs, Industry, Multi-National Corporations etc, should be involved in funding entrepreneurship education centres. Entrepreneurs and industries can also collaborate with university skill acquisition centres in aspect of providing practical experience and exposures outside of theoretical knowledge participants receive in university. In tandem with this line of thought, Ramon-Yusuf (2019) ^[24] observed the importance of collaboration between the government, leaders of

academia and captains of industry with the objective of making higher education work effectively in Nigeria on the issue of skills gap and graduate employability. He further observed that in a 2-day retreat and dialogue involving the above mentioned stakeholders who addressed many issues including:

- How industry can support the training of students to make them employable;
- Exploring a collaboration framework for knowledge and skill transfer; and
- The support by industry for entrepreneurship education in Nigeria universities and policy frameworks to encourage entrepreneurship education, among others.

Resources and Strategies Required in Refocusing University System

Refocusing public universities in the context of this article requires resources input to guarantee maximum productivity. Adequate resource input to achieve desired goals is a function of planning. It implies making a rational and systematic identification and estimation of resources that are required to accomplish the task. As an aspect of refocusing the system in this direction, the government, N.U.C. and University Managers must agree, meet, plan and work out the details of resources procurement to teach entrepreneurship education (skill). Edem (2006) alluded that teachers determine the success or failure of the implementation of educational programmes.

According to Ebong (2006), finance is the life-wire of education that is required for the procurement and maintenance of all other forms of educational resources, hence it must be adequate to achieve desired results. Money is required to procure instructional materials, write and procure textbooks on entrepreneurial skills acquisition, setting up of laboratories, workshops, studios, equipment, furniture, facilities, remuneration of staff in form of allowances and salaries, payment to collaborating private entrepreneurship centres for some practical orientations, outsourced university staff as resource persons as need arises, additional classroom blocks in skill acquisition centres, etc. These resources must be estimated and budgeted for the programme.

Strategies for refocusing the system but not limited to the followings to achieve desired results include:

- University lecturers should be trained on entrepreneurial building. That is, every lecturer should be trained to acquire a specific skill to impart on students and youths outside the system milieu. When made mandatory, every staff outside of his/her area of academic training, will have something to offer to the system tasked to midwife mass skill acquisition to all youths, including community based ones.
- All public universities must set up Entrepreneurship Education Centres managed by a director and appointed board members on tenure basis by the system management to oversee the purpose of setting up the centres.
- Every admitted and registered undergraduate student, must enrol for a skill where they have a flair, interest and aptitude.
- Every skill registered for by a student should be treated as a university wide course (i.e General Education Studies). The philosophy is to ensure that students take

the programme with all seriousness and commitment.

- The Director or Committee appointed to manage skill acquisition centres should work in tandem with General Education Studies Unit to ensure appropriate evaluation and recording of students' tests, continuous assessment and semester examinations.
- Skill acquisition programme should be made mandatory for all undergraduate students to instill seriousness. They should be made to pass all the programme courses in their respective skill, as obtained in General Education Studies before certification in the skill area.
- The NUC in collaboration with public university management should develop entrepreneurship education curricula. Skill contents in each acquisition area should be itemised stating the theoretical and practical aspects. Duration for each skill should be stated. Time-table should be planned to avoid clash with university wide courses, Faculty and Departmental ones. Scores based on performance in theory and practice must be entered in students' chart. Methods of examining and evaluating students should be clearly spelt out in their skill acquisition handbook. It should be done to accommodate them so as not to negatively affect the main degree programmes for which they were admitted to study in the first instance.
- Youths other than those in the system as undergraduates, if agreed to include them in the programme, should be properly organised. Local Government Chairmen and traditional rulers should be involved. They should provide comprehensive list of youths participating in skill acquisition from their respective localities for proper documentation, identification, tracing and presentation of starter packs on duly completion of their training, among other sundry supports.
- To reduce cost of skill acquisition programme, especially outside of university based centres in terms of infrastructural facilities, equipment, classrooms, etc, existing local craft centres, community town halls, women training centres, primary and secondary schools' premises, should be used as training centres.
- All participants either from the university as undergraduates and youths from the surrounding localities, should be presented with certificates after meeting minimum requirements for such award. Such certificate should be duly ensored by the university administration, bearing their logo and official seal. Certificate awarded should be equivalent with those issued by trade test bodies in Nigeria like National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTEB), for acceptance by all employers of labour, for recognition and proper grade level placement in both public and private organisations.
- For effective implementation at the community based level, tripartite funding is pertinent. Federal, State and Local Government must fund the programme if the desired goals for refocusing our public universities must be achieved concerning local based youths. Adequate agreement must be reached such as deduction from federally generated revenue administered by the Federation Account Allocation Committee (FAAC). Funding could also come from TETFund, VAT, etc. Funding outside of cash provision could be in form of

infrastructures, equipment, instruments, tools, workshops, laboratories of any kind, classroom blocks donation, starter-packs, etc. It must be stressed here that funding skill acquisition programme is very critical for its logical implementation and success. Other interested and concerned individuals and organisations such as – Philanthropists, NGOs, Faith based bodies, World Bank, Development Partners, Businesses, Corporate bodies, multinationals, etc, interested in ridding the society of crimes and criminality arising from idleness and unemployment among our teaming youths, are also most welcome in funding support.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This article dwelt on refocusing public universities for youths' skill acquisition toward combating unemployment challenges in Nigeria. This is in tandem with the introduction of entrepreneurship education into the national educational curricula by the Federal Government in 2002. It was aimed at providing students opportunities for entrepreneurial learning, create and increase the awareness of entrepreneurship, develop appropriate mindsets and behaviour favourable to enterprise development. The purpose of refocusing in this context is to implement entrepreneurship education policy by driving the process and midwife delivery of mass skill education programme to all Nigerian youths, for economic empowerment and self-reliant. Additional benefits of a refocused system includes increase in national Gross Domestic Product (GDP), security, reduction in violent and militant activities, religious extremism, armed bandits, etc. University system is endowed with potentials to combat unemployment with its attendant consequences. They are established to satisfy specific or general educational needs of individual nations through teaching of students, conduct of research and dissemination of knowledge together with other community service activities. The goals of university education makes them the most vital place to accumulate human capital in form of relevant manpower training, abilities, attitudes, skills and knowledge. Critical stakeholders in the establishment, regulation, management and support, must work together in form of pooling required resources to enable the system refocus to achieve the policy of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria.

To guarantee that the goals of refocusing public universities are attained in terms of ameliorating unemployment challenges in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

1. Governments (Federal, State and Local Governments) must show strong political will and commitment in skill acquisition for all Nigerian youths through adequate funding of public universities that will oversee the programme.
2. Government policy on entrepreneurship programme (skill acquisition) for our youths, should be revisited such as stating in an unambiguous terms on the goals, implementation strategies, major stakeholders involvement in terms of funding modalities (such as deduction at source from Federation Account), type of certificate and its equivalent ranking/grading in the public and private business service sectors, for purpose of recognition and placement and general acceptability.
3. Governments and university management should make

frantic effort in appealing to major International Development Partners, Worlds Bank, African Development Bank, United Nations, Philanthropists, Multi-national Corporations, Corporate bodies/businesses, etc, to lend support in funding skill acquisition for all youths in Nigeria.

4. To save cost of providing skill acquisition, National Youth Service Corps orientation camps in all the states of the federation, should serve as alternative Entrepreneurship Education Centres domiciled in public universities. This will also ensure that other youths not admitted in the system for degree programme beyond their control, would be equipped with appropriate survival skills for employment.

References

1. Adejumo AS, Tayo-Olajubutu TO. Spinning off an entrepreneurship culture among Nigerian university studies: Prospect and challenges. *African Journal of Business Management*. 2009; 3(3):80-88.
2. Ajufo BI. Challenges of youth unemployment in Nigeria: Effective career guidance as a panacea. *African Research Review*, Retrieved from www.ajol.info. 2013; 7(1):307.
3. Akpomi ME, Ikpesu OC. Entrepreneurship in tertiary education. In S.O. Nwafor & S.O. Oluwuo (Eds). *Management of education for sustainable national development in Nigeria*. Port Harcourt: University of Port Harcourt Press, 2020.
4. Amadi AW. Implementation of entrepreneurship education programme for economic empowerment of university students in Rivers State, 2017.
5. Dangana EA. Resources management in entrepreneurship practice. TET Fund capacity building workshop on entrepreneurship education and training in public tertiary institutions. November/December. 2014, 27-72.
6. Ebong JM. Educational finance and school budget. In P.O.M. Nnabuo, N.C. Okorie, O.G. Agabi, & L.E.B. Igwe (Eds). *Fundamentals of educational management*. Owerri: Versatile Publishers, 2006.
7. Edem DA. *Introduction to educational administration in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2006.
8. Ekpoh UI, Edet AO. Entrepreneurship education and career intents of tertiary education students, Akwa Ibom and Cross Rivers State, Nigeria. *International Education Studies*. 2011; 4(1):172-178.
9. Ezeugbor CO, Nwachukwu EA. Entrepreneurship education for self-reliance: The role of university management. *African Journal of Education and Research Development*. 2009; 3(2):175-183.
10. Fanimu D, Olayinka C. Tackling unemployment challenge in Nigeria. *Guardian Newspaper*, April, 28, 2009.
11. Federal Republic of Nigeria National policy on education (6th edition). Lagos: Nigerian educational research and development council (NERDC), 2014.
12. Igwe SC, Ainuddin MIL, Sherko L. Refocusing public universities in Nigeria for inclusive leadership. *International Journal of Politics and Good Governance*, 2016, 7(7).
13. Kafarmata AI. Management of entrepreneurship development center: Structure, operation, autonomy and domestication. TET Fund capacity building workshop on entrepreneurship education and training in public tertiary institutions. November/December, 2014, 144-147.
14. Makinde S. Makinde wants Nigeria's tertiary education refocused to produce more job creators. *Nigerian Tribune*, February, 18, 2020.
15. Merriam-Webstar Dictionary (n.d.). Retrieved from www.merriam-webstar.com.
16. Musari A. Youth and the national youth employment action plan, Abuja. *Guardian Newspaper*, March, 19, 2009.
17. National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) National population commission data. Retrieved from www.istmat.infofiles, 2013.
18. Nwikina GS. Entrepreneurship education indices in universities: Implications for effective management of unemployment in Rivers State. Unpublished M. Ed Thesis, University of Port Harcourt, 2016.
19. Okebukola PA. Entrepreneurship in university education: Beyond talk. 27th convocation lecture, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, 2011, 2-46.
20. Okozor DO. Skills acquisition for sustainable poverty alleviation. In proceedings of 14th National conference of Nigerian Association of Teachers Technology (NATT), 2001, 31-35.
21. Oladele PO, Akeke NI, Oladunjoye O. Entrepreneurship development: A panacea for unemployment reduction in Nigeria. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Economics and Management Sciences*. 2011; 2(4):251-256.
22. Peretomode VF. What is 'higher' in higher education? 16th in the series of inaugural lectures, Delta State University, Abraka, 2008.
23. Plecher H. Unemployment rate in Nigeria. Retrieved from www.statista.com, 2020.
24. Ramon-Yusuf S. Refocusing the Nigerian university system for creativity and nation-building, 2019.
25. Santos SC, Costa SF, Neumeyer X, Caetano A. Bridging entrepreneurial cognition research and entrepreneurship education: What and how. In M.H. Morris, & E. Liguori (Eds). *Annals of entrepreneurship education ad pedagogy*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2016.