



Promoting Skill Acquisition Among Over Certificated, Unemployed, Underemployed and Uneducated Nigerian Young People

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Abstract

The issue of over-certification, unemployment, underemployment, and a lack of formal education among Nigerian youth, who account for more than 70% of the population, presents a serious barrier to the country's socioeconomic growth. This paper investigates the significance of promoting skill acquisition and apprenticeship as effective strategies for addressing these interconnected challenges, providing a path for young Nigerians to gain relevant competencies, work experience, and self-reliance in the face of limited employment and educational opportunities. 556 young individuals were questioned using a questionnaire. 83.6% of respondents have several academic credentials but lack the practical skills and abilities required in the work market. Similarly, ignorant and undereducated youngsters aspired to receive formal education, yet the majority of them are skilled and gainfully employed. In light of this, the study highlights the value of skill development and apprenticeship programmes in offering over-qualified, jobless, underemployed, and illiterate Nigerian youth other routes to work and economic emancipation. Through these programmes, young people may enhance their employment chances and build marketable skills and job experience. They also provide mentorship and work-based learning opportunities.

Key words: Young People, Skill Acquisition, Apprenticeship, Over Certificated, Unemployed

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Introduction

The term youth often designate people who are in the period of life that falls between childhood and maturity, usually spanning from puberty to the early stages of adulthood. Although there isn't a single, widely accepted definition of youth, people in the roughly 15–30 age range are frequently included in discussions of the term, however meanings might change based on social, cultural, and legal settings. Without affecting other definitions by Member States, the UN defines "youth" as people between the ages of 15 and 24 in order to maintain statistical uniformity across states. In Nigeria, according to the National Bureau of Statistics, persons between the age of 15 and 35 are regarded as youth (NBS, 2022), and they constitute over 60% of the population. With a median age of 18.1 years, the nation boasts the biggest population of youth in the world. Of the

population, 42% is under the age of 15, and almost 70% is under 30. Within this group are two distinct classifications, the educated and uneducated, which can further be classified as employed, underemployed and unemployed. There are concerns about the population's general quality of life.

Nigeria's education system consists of three levels: primary (basic), secondary, and postsecondary (tertiary) education. Primary education normally begins at the age of six and lasts six years, whereas secondary education includes three years of junior secondary school and three years of senior secondary school. Tertiary education encompasses universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, and other specialised institutions (Birabil, & Ogeh, 2020). Despite great progress in increasing access to education, Nigeria confronts issues in guaranteeing the quality and equality of its educational system.

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Issues such as poor infrastructure, teacher shortages, obsolete curriculum, and financial limits impede the delivery of effective education throughout the country. Access to education is unequal across urban and rural areas, as well as across socioeconomic categories.

Among the educated is the issue of over-certification. The issue of over-certification among Nigerian young people refers to the phenomena in which young people earn several academic credentials without developing the practical skills and competences required to thrive in the profession (Ayua, 2019). Because of this, a lot of young Nigerians seek several degrees and certificates, sometimes without gaining the transferable skills and abilities that employers are looking for. This issue originates from a variety of elements within Nigeria's school system and socioeconomic context, posing numerous substantial obstacles. This issue is influenced by a variety of elements in Nigeria's education system and socioeconomic situation. For starters, there is a societal notion that academic certificates are synonymous with distinction and success, which leads young people to choose formal schooling over practical training and skill acquisition (Hassan & Varshney, 2019). Furthermore, the widespread notion that white-collar positions provide greater security and financial benefits encourages young people to pursue academic qualifications, even if they do not match their career goals or the demands of the economy (Paul, 2022).

The mismatch between the abilities that the educational system imparts and the talents that companies want exacerbates this problem. The theoretical and antiquated curriculum offered by many Nigerian educational institutions deprive graduates of the practical skills, technological know-how, and real-world experience that employers want. As a result, even with their extensive educational backgrounds, young Nigerians frequently find themselves unprepared for the working world, which contributes to high rates of underemployment and unemployment (Alonge & Ige, 2014; Aminu, 2019). Furthermore, the issue of over-certification is made worse by the restricted accessibility and availability of programmes for skill development and vocational training. The cycle of unemployment and poverty is exacerbated by the fact that many young people,

especially those from marginalised groups, lack access to high-quality chances for vocational education (Deebom 2019; Soyemi & Soyemi, 2019).

Nigeria's population is both huge and young, with a median age of about 18.1 years. Nigeria is the most populated country in Africa, with over 206 million people living there as of 2021, according to the World Bank. The percentage of the population that is employed in the commerce, services, informal economy, and agriculture is quite high, contributing to the labour force participation rate. The labour demographics of Nigeria are distinguished by a heterogeneous blend of educational backgrounds, experiences, and skill sets. Even though a large number of Nigerians hold formal education degrees, a sizeable section of the labour market is made up of people with non-formal skills and experiences from self-employment, apprenticeships, and vocational training.

The situation of young, illiterate Nigerians in the face of widespread unemployment highlights a serious social issue with long-term effects. A large percentage of young people in this nation, where educational possibilities are frequently few, are shut out of formal education systems, which leaves them unprepared to deal with the intricacies of the labour market (Okonkwo, 2019). According to the most recent data from UNESCO and the Global Education and Monitoring Report, Nigeria's out-of-school children number 20.2 million, more than twice the 10.5 million figure claimed for decades (Ndanusa, et. al., 2021; Oyekan, et. al., 2023, UNESCO, 2018). For many young, illiterate Nigerians, not having official degrees is a major job impediment. When someone lacks the necessary qualifications, employers frequently ignore them because they value academic accomplishments more than real-world experience or practical abilities. The cycle of economic marginalisation is sustained by this exclusion, which keeps young people in a state of long-term unemployment and denies them possibilities for career advancement and financial independence.

Furthermore, inequalities and vulnerabilities already present in Nigerian society are made worse by a lack of knowledge. The obstacles that uneducated kids from low-income families must overcome to get

educational chances and resources are structural. The cycle of educational deprivation and economic disadvantage is further entrenched by inadequate infrastructure, restricted access to high-quality education, and socioeconomic inequities (Egwakhe, & Osabuohien, 2009). Unchecked young unemployment has far-reaching societal and economic repercussions in addition to personal problems. Youth who are disillusioned and idle are vulnerable to radicalization, crime, and social instability, which puts local communities and national security at risk. In addition, the underutilization of human capital limits Nigeria's chances for sustained development and prosperity by impeding economic progress and stifling innovation.

It is worth recalling that unemployment and underemployment are worldwide issues. Young people are primarily affected by this global dilemma, whether in Europe (Dietrich, 2012), America (Pastore, 2018), Africa (Page, 2019), or Australia (Sutcliffe & Dhakal, 2018); yet, national experiences differ in many ways. This obstacle involves the difficulties of entering the work market, being underemployed, and not obtaining stable employment. In Asia, however, many young people work for themselves (McKay et al, 2018).

Skill acquisition and apprenticeship are critical in combating youth unemployment and underemployment because they provide young people with practical skills, job experience, and avenues to meaningful employment. It should be noted that prior to independence and up till early 1980s, Nigeria and Nigerians embraced skills acquisition which led to the establishments of Yaba Higher College in 1947 and other vocational schools and company based training centres followed. In the early 1980s, World Bank dropped their support for technical education in Africa by 40% basing the decision on rate of return study that gave general education over technical education (World Bank, 1995; Bennell & Segerstrom, 1998). This weakened outside support for TVET and had an impact on the bank's funded education and training initiatives (World Bank, 1995). After that, TVET's appeal started to decline since Nigeria's educational system was primarily designed with the general pathway in mind, and students who performed poorly were seen

to have little chance of succeeding in TVET (Osidiye, 2019a).

This paper is aimed at tackling unemployment and underemployment among young people who are over-certificated, unemployed, underemployed and uneducated by promoting skill acquisition and apprenticeship among Nigerian young people, irrespective of your educational background. It also highlighted the danger of over-certification with commensurate job and job satisfaction.

The issue of over-certification among young people in Nigeria is a serious one that affects employment prospects and economic growth. The term "over-certification" describes the situation in which people get many degrees without gaining the real-world experience and abilities that employers are looking for. This tendency is fuelled by a number of elements in Nigeria's socioeconomic context, educational system, and cultural traditions. The focus placed by society on formal education as a means of achieving success (World Bank, 1995; Bennell & Segerstrom, 1998) and elevating one's social standing is one of the main causes of over-certification. Multiple degrees and certificates are frequently seen in Nigerian society as an indication of intelligence, success, and respect. As a result, a lot of young people think that having more certifications is more important than having actual skills or vocational training.

In addition, the Nigerian educational system sometimes favours theory over practical knowledge, and its curricula may not necessarily reflect the needs of the job market. It is possible for graduates to have academic credentials but not the particular skills and competences that companies are looking for due to this mismatch between education and job demands (Yusuff, & Soyemi, 2012; Omokaro, & Akpojaro, 2022). It is possible, therefore, for young Nigerians to be over-certified on paper yet underqualified for the positions they are applying for. Over-certification has a negative and complex influence on career chances. First of all, even with many degrees, over-certified people may have trouble finding work. Employers who prefer applicants with a more balanced blend of academic credentials and practical experience may regard these individuals as deficient in relevant abilities or practical experience.

Over-certification among young people has serious, multidimensional effects on people's lives, communities, and economies. These effects include high rates of unemployment (Pitan, & Adedeji, 2012), underemployment (Ajufo, 2013; Omoniwa, & Adedapo, 2017), economic disempowerment (Abdussalam, 2015), wasted human capital (Füredi, 2009), brain drain (Docquier, & Rapoport, 2012) and socio-psychological impact (Sharok, 2018). To address these challenges, systemic reforms in education (Babajide, & Smith, 2022; Oloba, 2023), workforce development (Eze, & Okorafor, 2012), and employment policies (Maku, & Alimi, 2018) must be implemented to improve the alignment of

education and labour market needs, promote the recognition of practical skills and vocational training, and create inclusive economic opportunities for all young people.

Materials and Methods

This work has its foundation on an earlier work done on corporate apprenticeship programme [CAP]: solution to youth unemployment and poverty eradication (Soyemi, & Soyemi, 2020). This study employed a questionnaire to measure the skill level of youth aged 15 to 34 years. The research involved 558 young individuals from two states (Lagos and Ogun) in Southwest Nigeria, who completed the questionnaire.

Table 1: Respondents by State & Gender

Lagos		Ogun		Total
322		236		558
M	F	M	F	
224	98	162	74	558

There were 322, (representing 57.7%) and 236 (representing 42.3%) respondents from Lagos and Ogun respectively, totally 558. All in all, 69.2% and 30.8% of the participants were male and female respectively.

To provide a fair and accurate representation of the sample population, participants were randomly chosen from the streets during and after work hours from a diverse group of youngsters in and around Lagos and Ogun State, Nigeria by a group of 15 volunteers, who helped in the distribution of the questionnaire and interpretation of same to the

uneducated, under the supervision of the researcher. To fulfil ethical obligations, consents were taken from parents/guardians/trainers of minors (aged 15-17 years). All participants participated willingly after knowing the reason for the research.

Results

Figure 1 shows respondents by educational status. 275 of the respondents from Lagos are educated at least up to Secondary School level, while 47 were uneducated. In Ogun State, 190 and 46 of the respondents are educated and uneducated respectively.

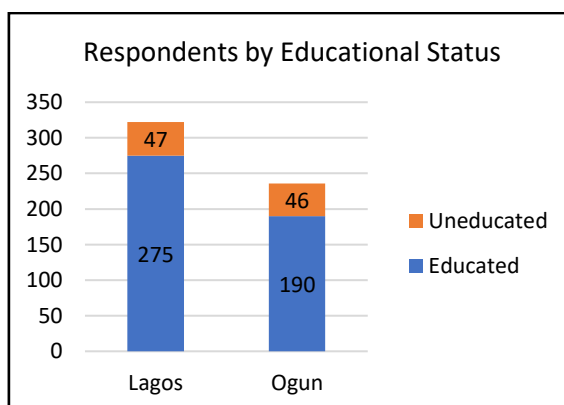


Figure 1: Respondents by Education

In total, 83.3% of the respondents were educated (having at least secondary education) while 16.7% were uneducated (never been to school or dropped out of primary school or at most, first school leaving certificate).

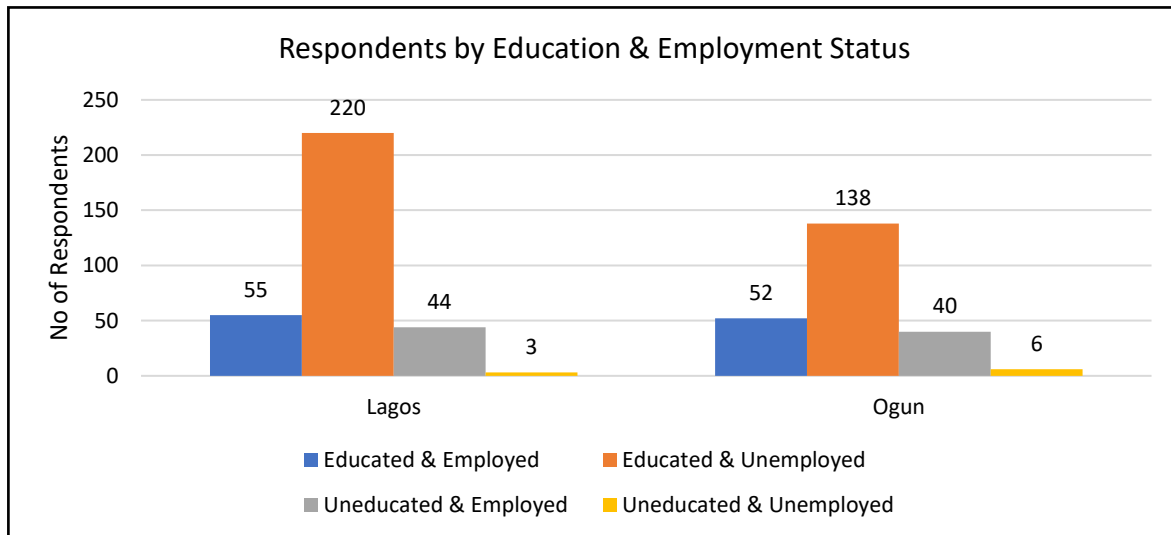


Figure 2: Respondents by Education & Employment Status

The survey shows that 64% of all the respondents were educated but unemployed or underemployed. This is largely attributed to lack of functional skills. 91% of the educated are without any skill that can make them independent or employable. Also, most of the educated are waiting for white collar jobs. Because of the pressure to study and unavailability of spaces in their loved careers, some of the educated young people actually studied courses they do not have flair for.

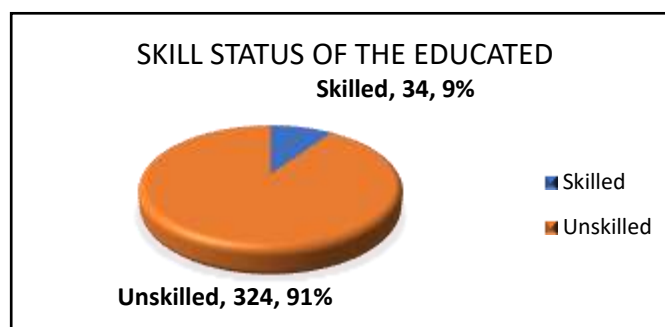


Figure 3: Skill Status of the Educated

From the findings, the 9% who were skilled are gainfully employed either by others or by themselves. That indicates directly that being skilful contributed to their employability state. The consequences of excessive certification are far-reaching. Aside from individual unhappiness and despair, there are bigger economic repercussions for Nigeria. A workforce with academic credentials but no practical skills reduce productivity, stifles innovation, and weakens the country's capacity to compete in the global economy. Most of the uneducated were skilful, though trained in the informal sector. They are gainfully self-employed and into various vocations



like welding, carpentry, shoe making, bricklaying, fashion designing and so on.

All the respondents feel that the negative attitude towards skill acquisition is principally due to Government disposition to Technical Education and skills acquisition. Over 65% of the graduates who are not skilful felt leaning skills and apprenticeship are for people with low academic prowess, therefore, they did not show interest in it.

Coordinated actions at all societal levels are required to address the unemployment and lack of education among young people in Nigeria. Expanding access to education, vocational training, and skill development programmes through government efforts is essential to empowering marginalised youth and providing them with the means of economic involvement and self-sufficiency. Furthermore, inclusive growth and social cohesion require focused investments to alleviate structural disparities, upgrade infrastructure, and generate employment opportunities.

Identified Challenges and Proposed Solutions

Based on the findings in this research work, promoting skill learning and apprenticeship among over-certificated and uneducated Nigerian young people necessitates a comprehensive strategy that tackles both individual and structural constraints as expressed by the respondents. Here are some of their concerns and treatments to consider:

Government Support: Government must show open and coordinated support for skill acquisition and apprenticeship programmes. The inclusion of skill in the student loan programme by the Federal Government is a welcome development. 69% of the respondents agreed that the Government did not show much interest in skill acquisition and apprenticeship programs. The respondents also suggested that Government should go further create a career path for the graduates of skill acquisition and apprenticeship programmes. They should not be on the same cadre with those with general education certificates

Awareness and Sensitization Campaigns: All the respondents agreed that awareness on skill acquisition and apprenticeship were

inadequate. A coordinated effort should be made to focus on educating parents, businesses, educators, and young people in Nigeria on the importance of apprenticeships and skill development as viable routes to employment and economic empowerment. Emphasise the testimonies and success stories of those who have profited from mentoring and hands-on training.

Curriculum Reform: 80% of the certificated respondents believed that the curricula they were trained with did not include enough skills acquisition programme. Advocacy is made for educational changes that include practical skills training, vocational education, and apprenticeship opportunities into secondary and post-secondary curricula. The curricula should be based on competency-based learning strategies that prioritise hands-on experience, problem-solving abilities, and industry applicability.

Partnerships with Industry: Most of the science-based respondents explained that the situation where students will look for placement by themselves should be discouraged. They emphasised that their schools should be the one in charge of students' placement in Industries. To this end, collaboration between educational institutions, government agencies, and private sector companies to create apprenticeship programmes that are suited to the requirements of certain industries and sectors should be encouraged. Also, employers should be involved in the design and execution of apprenticeship programmes to ensure that they are consistent with industry standards and labour market demands.

Expansion of Vocational Training Centres: Massive investment is required in the modernization and growth of technical schools, polytechnics, and vocational training centres to offer easily accessible, excellent skill-training programmes throughout Nigeria. Provide cutting edge

facilities, tools, and educational materials to these schools so they may offer practical teaching in trades like ICT, construction, automotive, and hospitality. At least one Technical School per Local Government Area should be created. Where there is difficulty in starting one, an existing Secondary School can be converted in “Senior Science and Technical School”.

Financial Support and Incentives: Not enough funds were provided for provided for the sector. It is advocated that financial assistance, scholarships, and incentives to encourage adolescents to participate in skill development and apprenticeship programmes. Provision of stipends, transit allowances and subsidised tuition fees to help underprivileged and marginalised youngsters balance the expenses of training and apprenticeship programmes (this has been covered by the Students Loan Programme).

Certification and Recognition: Create procedures for certification and acknowledgment of skills learned through apprenticeship and informal training programmes. The National Skill Qualification Framework [NSQF] as promoted by the National Board for Technical Education [NBTE] should be used for national competence standards, accreditation systems, and certification programmes to authenticate the skills and competencies acquired via practical training and job experience.

Entrepreneurship and Business Development Support: The certificated respondents requested for adequate training on entrepreneurship and business development, since one of the objectives of the skill acquisition is to become independent and a job creator. To achieve this, young people must also learn how to launch and grow their own enterprises, therefore, incorporating business development assistance and entrepreneurship training into skill-building

and apprenticeship programmes will be very helpful.

Skill acquisition and apprenticeship offer numerous benefits for individuals, communities, and economies. This includes: practical skills development, enhanced employability, job readiness, career advancement, economic empowerment, entrepreneurship opportunities, industry relevance, cost-effectiveness and lifelong learning. In general, anyone looking to start their own businesses, progress in their professions, or enter the workforce can benefit from a variety of skill development and apprenticeship programmes. Governments, businesses, and academic institutions can unleash the potential of their workforce, spur economic expansion, and encourage social inclusion and mobility by funding these initiatives.

Conclusion

The issue of over-certification among young people in Nigeria necessitates multidimensional solutions. It is imperative that the educational system undergo changes, including updating curricula to include industry-relevant skills and increasing chances for vocational training. Furthermore, initiatives to support innovation, entrepreneurship, and job development might allow young Nigerians different routes to success. Nigeria can enable its youth to realise their full potential and promote sustainable economic growth and development by providing them with a combination of academic credentials and real-world experience.

Beyond governmental action, partnerships with foreign partners, the commercial sector, and civil society organisations are essential for mobilising resources, knowledge, and creative solutions to address the complex issues that uneducated Nigerian young confront. Nigeria can unleash the potential of its youth population by empowering marginalised areas, investing in education, and advocating for equitable economic policies. By encouraging a more balanced approach to education and skill development, Nigeria may better prepare its youth for the realities of the labour market, increase their employability, and unleash their potential to contribute meaningfully to the country's socioeconomic progress.

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