

# YOUTHS, EDUCATION AND SKILLS GAP

## The Preamble

The Vice Chancellor, Lagos State University, Professor Lanre Fagbohun stated confidently that the products of the university are well equipped with skills to withstand the rigors and challenges of the labor market. These, he stated are the unique selling points of the graduates of the university. Professor Fagbohun made this remark on Monday, 7<sup>th</sup> May, 2018 at the press conference held to herald the 22<sup>nd</sup> convocation ceremonies. More so, the university 21<sup>st</sup> convocation lecture addressed the topic: Beyond Education: Bridging the gap for graduate employability.

A critical review into the two major events held by the university within two consecutive years showed a common pathway of focus. This is nonetheless than the reiteration of skills development for graduates. This then begs the question that; are the rigorous four, five or six years intellectual training of high standard given to the young minds by different experienced and distinguished scholars not enough for their employability in the labor market?

The provision of education is unarguably a productive investment in human capital, which is a stock of skills and knowledge acquired through schooling. Consequently, countries, individuals, communities and corporations invest massively in education to uplift their educational attainment. In Nigeria, for example, total university student enrolment increased from 724,856 in the 2004/2005 academic year and greatly moving up to about 1.9 million in the 2017/2018 academic session. In the same vein, total graduates turn out correspondingly grew across those years.

## The Crux

Despite this increased number of enrolment rate and increased graduate turnout, the issues of graduate unemployment poses a great challenge to many developing countries. The graduate unemployment in Nigeria is attributable to the fact that employee's education and skills acquired are inadequate to meet the demands of modern day jobs. Thus, the extent of the mismatch between graduate turnout vis-à-vis their skills and low employment rate raises the assertions of major gap between youths, education and skills.

Globally, the above assertions of a gap have been corroborated as at different times. The former United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon once called for sustained investment in youth skills to help achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. He affirmed that those aged 15-24 make up 40% of those unemployed worldwide, due to their lack of skills necessary to be gainfully employed. More so, the European Union also affirmed that 40% of employees in the EU have issues finding people with the skills they need while a larger number of people are working in jobs that do not match their aptitudes.

Thus, the notion of a gap between youths, education and skills is no more a doubt but a global challenge. Like so many contributors to global poverty, the youth skills gap is anything but an intractable problem.

## **The Prescription**

Indeed, there is no use crying over spilt milk. However, it is a necessity that we trace the very beginnings of our problems and when the rain began to beat us. Having done this, the next step is to consider actionable solutions that can bridge the gap between youths, education and skill.

Education and training systems need to keep pace with the new demands of labor market that are continually challenged by technological disruption, demographic change, shifting business models and the evolving nature of work. To close the skills gap, there is a need to start with the learning gap. There should be a change in curriculum such that it accommodates skills development apart from the usual way of total focus on intellectual academic works, which should be addressed in a sustainable manner.

Thus, it is crucial to align workforce needs to education reform, keeping in mind that employers seek “whole persons”. The creation of a place for employers at the education reform table and vice versa can foster greater dialogue and influence in both directions, from employers to educators.

Also, tertiary institutions being at the frontiers of human capacity development should collaborate with governments and labor market in planning their curriculum in line with what is needed for graduate performance in the workplaces. Literacy in information and communication technology should be an integral part of the education processes. The removal of courses that are not marketable in the present day market from our tertiary institutions curriculum, and also the compulsion of verbal and written communication as a course of study for all discipline should be enacted as it is inevitably a major skill required in the labor market.

Corporate companies, and other organizations should be liberal enough to offer students internship positions so as to complement their fertile intellectual ground with practical skills to aid later cultivation of educated, skilled and employable graduates. This inturn will be of immense benefit to the organizations in due course.

Further, the academia and other relevant agencies should engage the politicians about changing the game. The enactment of adequate policies will be of immense help in closing this gap. In June 2017, President Trump signed an executive order to expand apprenticeships and reduce apprenticeships regulation. Government bodies should be encouraged in creating policies geared towards the promotion of entrepreneurial skills in all level of education. An example of such policy is the Ready Set Work Initiative introduced by the Lagos State Government. It's unarguable that skills that cannot be covered in the school curriculum are being passed on to students by juggernauts of industries and entrepreneurial community.

In conclusion, while we face the certainty of the automation of numerous workforce activities in the future, we hear the loud voice of employers affirming that today,there aren't enough skilled workers to meet their need globally. Interestingly, there are certain skills and competencies supporting collaboration, communication and mental agility that are likely to be least automated, which happens to be the same skills facing talent deficits. This could be seen as great news if

we are prepared to close the gap. With the concerted effort of individuals, academic institutions, governments, businesses and multilateral organizations, it can become less and less of an obstacle to shared prosperity.