



## Non-formal education learning environment: An antidote for employment opportunities for youths in communities in Anambra State, Nigeria

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on the initiation and promotion of non-formal education in all communities for youths in order to reduce the rate of unemployment in Anambra State using non-formal education learning environments. It focuses on the initiation and institutionalization of vocational, technical, and agricultural learning environments for practical learning and the up scaling of indigenous industries for employment amongst youths in all communities in Anambra State.

**Keywords:** non-formal education learning environment, unemployment, youths

### Introduction

Non-formal education is a comprehensive and inclusive concept that covers educational processes and practices outside of school. It is basically designed to equip individuals (including vulnerable people) with veritable skills and capabilities for living a rewarding life in a community. It is an inclusive education which has the capacity to equip men and women to contribute to community and national development effectively. Non-formal education through its programmes such as vocational-technical training, professional, agricultural, and entrepreneurial programmes in all spheres of knowledge provides employment opportunities for individuals irrespective of their ages. This enables them to be useful to themselves and society at large.

Non-formal education improves employment opportunities and income, which is a key pathway to realizing a range of other benefits. It enables people to choose and shape the context in which they live and work, particularly for individuals less likely to be in employment, such as migrants and women from ethnic minorities, among others. Non-formal education through entrepreneurship education reduces the rate of unemployment in the urban and rural areas of Anambra State by equipping individuals, especially youths, with the vital knowledge and skills for setting up and running small and medium enterprises effectively. A non-formal education learning environment can be defined as an indigenous learning environment for the promotion of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It plays a central role in preparing youths for employment and responding to labour market needs through its diverse programmes. Employment is necessary for the sustainable welfare, growth, peace and security of any community. In this paper, focus will be placed on agricultural and vocational/technical programmes as antidotes to alleviating the problems of unemployment in Anambra State.

Unemployment refers to a situation whereby individuals who are employable and seeking a job are unable to find a job. It is a situation where someone of working age is not

able to get a job but would like to be in full-time employment. Though unemployment affects people of all categories in Nigeria, it has a greater impact on the youth. The Federal Government has tried to tackle unemployment and reduce poverty through various intervention programmes, but the level of unemployment is still soaring. The issue of unemployment has become a worldwide challenge. The menace of unemployment in Nigeria, especially in Anambra State, has been an issue of great concern to policymakers, economic managers, individuals, economists, governments and a host of others (Bello, 2003). Unemployment, especially among the youth, could be addressed through agricultural education using extension education workers.

Nigeria has over-relied on the oil sector. Presently, there is a need for diversification of the economy, particularly in the areas of agriculture and mineral resources. The period of oil boom has gone and people are now facing oil doom, which requires serious attention to the diversification of the economy in order to restore the economy to normalcy. Agriculture offered about 70% of the GDP and job market in 1960-1964 and as at 2012, it was about 37.02% (Maria as cited in Orji, 2018) [6]. Solid minerals contributed about 33% in 1960-1970 but less than 1% in 2010 (Ayodele, 2013) [1].

Unemployment is one of the greatest challenges facing the Nigerian economy. It has maintained a rising trend over the years. Specifically, the unemployment rates and GDP rates in Nigeria as well as their poverty indices from 2015 to 2019 are as follows:

Table 1

Year	Unemployment Rate	GDP Rate	Poverty Index
2019	27.1%	\$448.12B	92.1%
2018	25.2%	\$397.19B	92.1%
2017	24.1%	\$375.75B	61.2%
2016	23.4%	\$404.65B	57.2%
2015	21.65%	\$486.80B	55.8%

Sources: World Bank Development Indicators (2022); Macrotrends (2022).

One can therefore conclude that unemployment in Nigeria poses a threat to development, security, and peaceful co-existence. Adoption of approaches, methods, strategies, and programmes can impact unemployment. For example, community learning centres, which provide an adult learning environment, can be cited in rural communities to provide education and training for youth.

Youth are the leaders of tomorrow. Youths possess creative skills, boundless energy, enthusiasm, and revolutionary thoughts, which they can use in their environment for survival. They are vibrant agents of social and economic change. Governments at all levels have embarked on several projects and programmes for the economic and overall empowerment of youths, but not much has been achieved. Hence, this paper intends to contribute to knowledge with regards to boosting employment among youths by initiating and promoting adult education learning environments for technical, vocational, and agricultural training in various communities in Anambra State. The paper will be discussed under the following subheadings:

### **What is Non-Formal Education?**

A non-formal education learning environment can simply be defined as education towards maturity. This implies that it is a lifelong education process geared towards maturity and development in all areas of life, irrespective of age. It is a kind of education geared towards the acquisition of skills in order to meet up with the ever evolving skills and knowledge in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Non-formal education is an alternative or a complement to formal education within the process of the lifelong learning of individuals. It covers programmes contributing to adult and youth literacy and education for out-of-school children, as well as programmes on life skills, work skills, and social or cultural development. Non-formal education is open to any age, origin, and personal interest. It is a voluntary type of education with diverse teaching methods, and its end goal is not a degree but rather pure learning.

Non-formal education is any educational activity carried out outside the framework of the formal school system to provide learning to a particular sub-group of the population, adults as well as children. It is a life-long process of learning that includes adult education, the apprenticeship system, continuing education, in-service programs, on-the-job training programs, personal and professional development, and workers' and students' industrial training. Non-formal education is designed to encourage all forms of functional education given to youths and adults outside the formal school system, such as functional literacy, remedial, and vocational education (FRN, in Ossai & Nwalado, 2014)<sup>[9]</sup>.

Non-formal education is all planned, structured programmes and processes of personal and social education for young people designed to improve a range of skills, capabilities and competences outside the formal school system. It is what happens in places such as youth organizations, sports clubs, drama and community groups where young people meet to undertake projects together, play games, discuss or make music and drama. Non-formal education should be: voluntary, accessible to everyone; an organized process with educational objectives; participatory; learner-centred; about learning life skills and preparing for active citizenship; based on involving both individual and group learning with a collective approach; holistic and process-oriented; based

on experience and action; and organized on the basis of the needs of the participants.

In this paper, a non-formal education learning environment is a learning environment that adopts the characteristics of non-formal education in facilitating the learning of youths in different areas of knowledge and practical learning. In this paper, non-formal education is seen as the solution to the problem of unemployment in Nigeria.

### **Unemployment in Nigeria**

Unemployment is a term referring to individuals who are employable and actively seeking a job but are unable to find a job. People in the workforce who are working but do not have an appropriate job are included. Unemployment includes people who are waiting to return to a job after being discharged. It does not include individuals who have stopped looking for work for various reasons, such as leaving work to pursue higher education, retirement, disability, or personal issues. But people who are not actively seeking a job but do want to work are not classified as unemployed.

Youth unemployment is exactly what its name implies: it occurs when young people aged 15 to 24 are looking for work but are unable to find it. It is the most critical problem confronting Nigeria. The number of young people that were unemployed in 2017 was comprised of 26.58%. It increased to 29.72% in the third quarter of 2018. The number of unemployed young people alone was 12,145,708 (NBS, 2018)<sup>[7]</sup>. It is evident that this number consisted mainly of the young. Youth unemployment serves as a platform for the breeding of social problems. Unemployed people experience frustration, shame, unfriendliness, and sadness. Some of the youth are attracted to crime as a result of joblessness. This was confirmed by Okojie (2003)<sup>[8]</sup>, who stated that youths get involved one way or the other in critical activities as a result of unemployment. Others take part in militancy activities in the Niger Delta; Boko Haram activities; prostitution; armed robbery; oil bunkering; car snatching; agents of terrorist groups for suicide bombing execution; and vandalization of pipelines, among others.

Several policy measures have been introduced to contain this situation. The policy measures introduced by successive governments in Nigeria with a view to reducing unemployment include the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Youth Policy, Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWin), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), N-Power programme, and Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS), among others. Some levels of success were recorded by some of these measures in terms of reducing unemployment, while others recorded significant levels of failure. Notwithstanding the pressure of these measures, one of the foremost problems in Nigeria remains unemployment. Unemployment is a major life event. It has a devastating impact on people's lives. It affects not only the unemployed person but also his or her family and the larger community. The impact of unemployment can be long-lasting. The loss of income by the parents could damage the prospects of the next generation. The financial, budgeting; and economic effects of unemployment are profound. The loss to the individual and the family cannot be overstated.

Unemployment reduces a person's income in the short term and reduces their ability to save for retirement and other goals in the long term. This is because employer, as well as

employee superannuation contributions, are lost and the capacity to save from disposable income is lowered. Unemployment has a greater impact on people of retirement age who have significant ongoing financial commitments such as mortgages or rent, student education expenses, and obligations to support dependents. The trend to late marriages and childbearing and young people participating in education for longer periods means that many mature-age people have dependent children and significant ongoing family and financial responsibilities.

Unemployment impacts strongly on the health of those already socio-economically disadvantaged. The fact that ill health and incapacity can cause unemployment increases the complexity of any analysis. The relationship between unemployment and health is complex and differs among groups of people. The antidote for unemployment in Nigeria specifically refers to practical-oriented training in vocational, technical and agricultural training through the auspices of non-formal education.

### **What is Vocational/Technical Education?**

Vocational/technical education is designed to offer people the opportunity to improve themselves in their general proficiency, especially in relation to their present or future occupation. The concept of vocational and technical education is therefore a single and inseparable concept used to describe education for the acquisition of socially acceptable skills. Vocational and technical education is a comprehensive term referring to the educational process when it involves, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related science and the acquisition of practical skills and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life.

Vocational and technical education is an educational training which encompasses knowledge, skills, competencies, structural activities, abilities, capabilities, and all other structural experiences acquired through formal or on-the-job training and which is capable of enhancing recipients' opportunities to secure jobs in various sectors of the economy or even enabling the person to be self-dependent by being a job creator. Vocational and technical education is a skill-oriented programme that prepares individuals for purposeful living. It improves the quality of life of people if appropriate skills are gained. Vocational and technical education deals with knowledge, skills, competencies, and aptitudes that fit an individual wholly and entirely for work or business. It prepares individuals for jobs that are based on manual and practical activities in relation to specific trades, occupations, or vocations. Vocational and technical education, in this paper, is education that prepares youths for employment opportunities that are centred on practical skills in relation to trades, occupations, or vocations so as to be self-reliant. It is education that transfers practical competence to the youths for the sustenance of the country.

Vocational and technical education learning environments in communities for youths are very imperative because effective acquisition of vocational and technical skills will inculcate entrepreneurial skills that would help the youths to be self-reliant, which will in turn reduce unemployment in Anambra State. It trains young people in the development of consumer business and socio-economic skills. Vocational and technical education will provide the training and skills that will lead to the production of craftsmen, technicians, and other skilled personnel who will assist in transforming the various communities in Anambra State. The youths

would be sensitized, mobilized, motivated, and geared for self-employment and self-reliance through vocational and technical education. When the youths are trained vocationally or technically, it would help them to be self-reliant in different areas, such as electrical, plumbing, automobiles, and so on.

It is very imperative to look at the countries that have used vocational and technical education for survival. In Korea, vocational education is provided under the formal education system at the secondary level by vocational high schools and at the post-secondary level mainly by junior colleges. Vocational high schools offer three-year programs and fall into the following major categories: agriculture, technology, industry, commerce, fishery, and marine transportation; and comprehensive vocational colleges provide two-year programs that lead to a diploma or associate degree (Government of Alberta, 2009, Pp. 37-39) <sup>[4]</sup>. Only 20% of vocational high school graduates enter the labor market directly, whereas 70% continue with higher education in Korea (Chae & Chung, 2009) <sup>[3]</sup>. The scope of vocational and technical education in Pakistan is quite small. Vocational education is provided through polytechnics, vocational training centres, apprenticeship schemes, and various training and vocational institutions. Skill development has been among the most neglected areas in Pakistan. The country has not been able to improve vocational and job skills (Kemel, 2005).

In Germany, a fairly uniform and highly regulated vocational education and training system has been established. There are a number of different training programmes in place, including full-time school programmes that do not include practical training. This system straddles upper secondary and post-secondary education: students enter vocational school after they complete lower secondary education and continue in vocational programs lasting two to four years, depending on the specialization. Trainees spend three to four days a week at a company to learn the practical foundations of their occupation.

Vocational education and training are regulated and funded by both the federal government and the German industry. Employers and trade unions play an important role in the decision-making process and in the development of curricula and competency standards. In their classes, students learn job-specific as well as general education subjects. Programmes conclude with examinations administered either by the government or by industry associations such as regional chambers of commerce or chambers of crafts. Graduates earn a state-examined or state-recognized vocational title or a journeyman certificate, all of which are official certifications recognized throughout Germany. In 2015, there were officially recognized vocational occupations, ranging from carpenter to industrial electrician, tax specialist, dental technician, film and video editor, and product designer.

### **What is Agricultural Education?**

Agricultural education is the teaching of agriculture, natural resources, and land management. It is undertaken to prepare students for employment in the agricultural sector. Classes taught in an agricultural education curriculum may include horticulture, land management, turf grass management, agricultural science, small animal care, machine and shop classes, health and nutrition, livestock management, and biology. Agricultural education is common at the primary, secondary, tertiary, and adult levels. It prepares students for

successful careers and a lifetime of informed choices in the global agriculture, food, fibre, and natural resource systems. Agricultural education encompasses the study of applied sciences and business management principles. It goes beyond knowledge and skills development. Agricultural education provides opportunities to learn basic agricultural skills and knowledge; occupation training and retraining; and professional growth and development. It focuses on but is not limited to, studies in horticulture, forestry, conservation, natural resources, agricultural products and processing, production of food and fibre, aquaculture and other agricultural products, mechanics, sales and service, economics, marketing, and leadership development. In this paper, agricultural education is education designed to enable youths in communities in Anambra State to engage in agricultural activities to earn a living so as to be employers of labour. It is education planned to equip youths with veritable skills and competencies required to settle down in agricultural and income-generating activities to be useful to themselves and society at large.

The agricultural education learning environment in communities for youths is very crucial in the sense that it helps youths to learn ways to gain a better understanding of food production and distribution. It provides opportunities for youths in communities to learn basic agricultural skills and knowledge, as well as occupational training and retraining.

Agricultural education offers the younger generation a chance to make a difference by growing enough food to feed the world. Those who become farmers now have the opportunity to be the generation to end world hunger and alleviate malnutrition.

Furthermore, agricultural education increases interest in agriculture among youths. It helps to utilize human resources among youths in communities to chart a new course for agricultural development. Several countries have used agricultural education to survive. In the Philippines, agriculture dominates the economy. It furnishes employment to about 3 million people; or about 60 % of the gainfully employed workers. Agricultural operations provide 40% to 45% of the total income and about 75% to 80% of the country's exports.

### Implications

The following implications were stated thus:

1. Youth involvement in vocational or entrepreneurial programs reduces illegal and dangerous drug trafficking because they will be busy.
2. Youth involvement in agricultural and technical programmes would increase the GDP of Nigeria and reduce criminal activities and other social vices drastically.
3. Youths involved in agricultural and vocational programmes would be job providers instead of job seekers.
4. Youth involvement in agricultural development programmes enables them to have opportunities for self-development.

### The Way Forward

The following would help to improve employment opportunities:

1. Agriculture should be included as a compulsory subject in Nigerian schools.

2. Youths should be involved in the drafting, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programmes related to agriculture.
3. Youths who are currently in agriculture should be encouraged and honoured so that others will have an interest in agriculture.
4. Training programmes for youths should be focused on modern practices.
5. Training programmes at primary and secondary schools should be improved.
6. Advocacy work aimed at creating entrepreneurial awareness among youth should be encouraged.

### Conclusion

Non-formal education is a comprehensive and inclusive concept that covers educational processes and practices outside of school. It is designed to equip individuals with veritable skills for living a rewarding life in a community. Non-formal education through its programmes such as vocational-technical training, professional, agricultural, and entrepreneurial programmes in all spheres of knowledge provide employment opportunities for individuals irrespective of their ages. This enables them to be useful to themselves and society at large. Non-formal education through vocational or technical education reduces the rate of unemployment in the urban and rural areas of Anambra State by equipping individuals, especially youths, with the vital knowledge and skills for setting up and running small and medium enterprises effectively.

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