

Review

Analysis of current educational system and its ability to revolutionize the persistent rate of unemployment in Ghana

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Unemployment problem is known to be a global phenomenon and governments over the world have been trying very hard to either eliminate this completely or reduce its effect on the economic development. In Ghana, the problem has become a playing field for several governments over the years. Many political parties have gained advantage by promising electorates during campaign periods of providing several jobs when they are given the nod to rule the country for the four year constitutionally mandated period. Unfortunately, however, the problem still persists after several years of constitutional rule and several loans “purportedly” pumped into the economy with the aim of generating more jobs. It seems to the ordinary Ghanaian, however, that the policy makers and implementers over the years have lost focus regarding any meaningful measure that could reduce the menace of unemployment in the country. Many observers and social commentators have been trying to suggest some drastic measures that could change the situation in the near future. Many have also complained about the quality of skills acquired by graduates from our Universities and the ability to apply same on the job. This article looked at the problem holistically, especially among the graduates, and suggested some practical and radical measures necessary to change the situation and hopefully reduce the effects of the problem on the economic development. The article looked at the current educational and skills training system and made analysis of whether new and drastic measures would help to change the persistence of the unemployment rate in the country in the near future.

Key words: Quality education, tailor-made skill, unemployment, Ghana.

INTRODUCTION

The issue of unemployment have been one of the major problems in the country for some time now. Many opinion leaders, youth activist and other concerned groups and individuals have expressed their worries on the issue. In recent times there have been some group calling itself Unemployed Graduate Association of Ghana (UGAG) and many youth groups advocating for pressure on the governments to create jobs in the country as promised in their manifestos. Their intention was to send message out there to leaders about the fact that they have some skills to be implemented on the job markets but cannot find those jobs because there were no vacancies.

The UN's definition of unemployed person could be the one who is qualified with some skills and cannot find a

job to make good use of those skills. The under-employed is somebody who have acquired skills and experience but employed on a job that requires skills far below his or her expertise hence underutilising her/his potentials. Finally, the unemployable person is the one who does not have the requisite skills that the job market requires for the fulfilment of the corporate objectives.

Various politicians over the years have used the issue of unemployment for cheap political crave. They have over the years promised to make good policies that would reduce the menace drastically, if not eliminate completely. We have heard some politicians who promised to improve the lots of the unemployed youth, especially graduates.

Issues of Unemployment in Sub-Saharan Africa

The issue of unemployment, have been one of the biggest headache of many governments over the world in recent times. It is for this reasons that Heads of State from all over the world met in September 2000, in the largest ever high-level gathering at the United Nations, and adopted the Millennium Declaration and the MDGs. By this declaration and setting the MDGs, countries committed themselves to making significant progress on key dimensions of development by 2015. To ensure significant progress towards achieving these goals, the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit urged developing countries to “adopt, by 2006, and implement comprehensive national development strategies to achieve the internationally agreed goals and objectives, including the Millennium Development Goals”

In 2007, the Inter-Agency and Experts Meeting on the Millennium Development Goals Indicators came up with a new target and indicators that further focused on employment, health and other determinants of poverty. In the same year, 43 countries in sub-Saharan Africa adopted MDG-consistent Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) emphasizing decent employment as a way out of poverty. Africa’s commitment to the MDGs was a reaffirmation of the African Union Summit held in Banjul, The Gambia in 2006, and at subsequent African Union summits and ministerial conferences as well as ECA Conferences of African Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, specifically the fortieth Conference in 2005, which called for firmly grounded action plans to achieve the Goals.

Despite the numerous declarations and commitments, the overall employment situation in Africa has not changed over the last decade. The majority of the population are employed in the agriculture sector, rather than in services and industry. The majority employed in the agricultural sector are daily income earners, small-scale farmers and unpaid family workers. The high exposure of the agricultural sector to natural incidents such as droughts and other environmental changes increases the vulnerability of employees in this sector.

According to the ILO report in 2008, the population of Africa remains the world’s fastest growing and most youthful. Young people continue to have better chances of surviving into old age than any other group. In 2008, more than 60 per cent of the African population was below 25 years old. Young people aged between 15 and 24 in the African labour force suffer the most because they lack adequate education, work experience and job experience sought by employers, as well as suffering from a mismatch between their skills and the available jobs in the market. It is therefore not surprising that the ILO report put youth unemployment at about 11.3 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa.

According to the report, over 200 million Africans are now

officially designated as youth (i.e. aged 15 to 24). Young people make up 40 per cent of Africa’s working-age population, and they have the highest unemployment rates. Youth unemployment in sub-Saharan Africa has persisted at approximately 12 per cent for the last decade. The share of unemployed youth among the total unemployed was as high as 83 per cent in Uganda, 68 per cent in Zimbabwe and 56 per cent in Burkina Faso. According to the World Bank report, 72 per cent of African young people live on less than US\$ 2 a day (World Bank 2009a).

In Ghana, as well as other Sub-Saharan African countries, there seems to be an unhappy blend of unemployment and underemployment, which tend to mar the efforts of the country to fully utilize its human resources. Interestingly, the nation has been experiencing steady economic growth rate over the last five years or so but this has not reflected on the country’s ability to generate more jobs for the teeming youth. While issues of human resource underutilization have important welfare implications, not much has been done within the context of Ghana to examine the causes and subsequent policies that may be needed to address these.

Role of Politics

As stated earlier, many politicians have taken advantage recently of the unemployment situation in the country to win votes from the electorates. Unfortunately, the best these politicians could do was to introduce the National Youth Employment Program (NYEP) which took many guys and gals from street hawking and put them back on the street for now a formal job. Most of the youth engaged in the program were those lifted from the streets where they sell various items, from cold water to shoes, artefacts and alcoholic beverages. But now they are back on the street as either cleaners or traffic controllers. These were some of the best and proud employment programs that have been touted by these politicians over the airwaves for many years and even more years to come. Finally we heard from the same politicians somewhere along their tenure that those who said there isn’t money in the country and for that matter they cannot get enough to feed themselves and their family are just the lazy ones.

Other group of politicians also promised the same youth of providing them with employment. But the best they could also offer is to expand the same unsustainable program by sending some of the youth back to the street to fill the grave-holes on the roads. After pronouncing publicly that they have created over one million and six hundred thousand jobs within a period of one year, we could still see many youth languishing around during working hours.

Unfortunately most of these programs, if not all, were

geared towards the graduates from our tertiary institutions. They were rather programs of rebranding the street hawking jobs, which many think are not palatable for our youth, from hustling for themselves to now hustling for some payment from the government in some five to eight months time. Still the unemployed graduate has no job in all these programs. Some of them have taken refuge in various churches where they are given the impossible hope by the pastors, who promised them of getting jobs ones they make good offers to God.

It is very obvious that the unemployment problem, especially among the graduates from our universities, would continue to stay with us for many years. Though unemployment could not be completely eliminated from the nation, it is important to seriously reduce the rate in order to curb the menace of social vices such as the common internet fraud known in the local parlance as Sakawa.

The major question that boggles the minds of many in the country is whether there are unemployed graduates or rather unemployable graduates in Ghana. While many of the youth groups and some politicians believe there is unemployment because the governments in power do nothing to generate jobs, others have the view that what Ghana is suffering from is rather unemployable graduates.

Skills Development of the Youth

At a forum organised by Radio Gold, a popular radio station in the capital city Accra, in collaboration with the World Bank, various panellists contributing to the program attest to the fact that what Ghana is suffering from is rather unemployable graduates but not unemployed graduates. One of the panellists, a popular motivational speaker and satire, expressed disgust on various graduate students he met on our university campuses on some of his tours. He alluded that most of our graduates have no skills on any real world jobs and some of them offer courses that they themselves had no interest in. These graduates, he said, are mostly interested in the kind of fat salaries to be receiving if they get the job and the big cars they could be driving after their university education because they are graduates. Another contributor, a popular businessman now turned politician and in parliament thought that the graduates from our universities are just not prepared for the job market. According to him, most of them appear at interviews not prepared and having no clue as to the jobs they would be required to do when offered the employment.

One striking revelation during the discussion came from a representative from the Free Zone Board, (a government institution that encourages investors to locate their businesses at some particular parts of the

country in order to enjoy some tax heavens. The purpose is to deurbanise the concentration of businesses in the city centres in order to reduce the problem of urbanisation). He gave an example of a local company that manufactures camping equipments that are supplied to the USA army. According to him, the company some time ago was looking for welders to be employed for the company but could not find any skilful welders in Ghana and has to recruit welders from the Philippines.

This was very serious disgrace if his assertion is anything to believe. We can count several welders on each street of Accra when you drive around. Specific interest areas are the various newly developing sites of Accra and other big cities of the country where you could see these welders making containers and metal gates for homes and many others such metals. But the big question is whether any of them could stand the test of displaying skills when engaged by a serious investor in the manufacturing industry. There are many mechanics who only engage in try-and-error tactics when they are trying to fix your damaged vehicle. Many of them end up creating major problem with the vehicle that could cost you several hundreds of cedis to fix. They do not concentrate on one category or make of vehicle but rather claim to be capable in all kinds of vehicles. Why don't they apply their skills on one type of vehicle over time to become experts on that make such that they can offer reliable services to their clients? There are several carpenters in various parts of the country who make beds that only last for a year or two and the list goes on and on.

Interestingly, there are various graduates who have no clue what productivity gap the employer needs to be bridged when she engages them to a job. Majority of these graduates only have big dreams of some kind of fat salaries at the end of the month. They are enchanted with which kind of big car they would drive and the beautiful house they wish to live in when they get the job. What they refuse to actually think of is what they bring to the table when employed. The fact is that the employer is looking for somebody who she/he can use to solve problems in order to make big money in the future. The employer's interest is what can be squeezed out of your blood for the benefit of the company. This is the measure for your salaries, though there are some greedy employers who take so much from you and pay you very scanty salary that cannot match what you do for the company. There are many graduates from various business schools who have not conducted a simulated strategic thinking for solving a business problem. Many of our students don't understand what it meant to invest in oneself by reading materials that boost your analytical brain. Many don't even know how to take advantage of the internet technology craze going around Africa but rather resort to charting with friend and thinking of how to dupe somebody from the West.

Academic and skills training disaster?

As a lecturer in finance, mostly at the higher levels, I have come across many undergraduates, who were preparing for the job markets in the near future, offering banking and finance but cannot even tell you the hurdle rates. They have no idea what is going on in the banking industry of the country and some have surprisingly never visited any of the banks in the country. They however tell you that they want to be working at the banks when they completed the course. Whatever was learnt during the previous semester was completely forgotten and any references to those lessons will just remind you of playing Talking-drum for European or Western Whiteman. Meanwhile some of these courses are supposed to be continuous and therefore build-up knowledge.

They are very eager to finish school but never minding what skills they are going out there with. Majority of them would run away from analytical questions during exams and if the questions involve essay writings you may have a rush of blood through your brain when reading their scripts. Their interests lie in the kind of houses they would like to live in and the kind of cars they would like to drive. Most of them, even the ladies, have very good knowledge about all the big cars in town and who drives the best car on campus. They have no idea about the local or international news on business developments and do not even see that as personal challenges to their future career developments.

There are various business courses being run by various tertiary institutions in the country. Most of these business courses are well accredited by the National Accreditation Board and are supposed to train the Ghanaian youth to manage businesses in the country. The unfortunate things that, in my opinion, are lacking in these courses are the practicality of the courses. Students of business study courses complete their honours after several years in school but have not seen a business plan before let alone being able to even read through one. These students cannot put a simple business proposal together or develop a useful business plan or a marketing plan.

There are several accounting students who complete their honours but cannot even conduct a simple bank reconciliation investigation. Economic students complete a four year course without analysing one single economic policy or conducted a simple analysis of a budget statement of the country. Students acquire honours in finance without a single analysis of financial or management statement of a single organisation in the country. Graduates boast of offering courses in investment management without conducting a single case study on any portfolio of a single brokerage company in the country. In fact, what is very common these days among these students is to download materials

from the internet when they are given case study questions and without even editing what they have downloaded, present it as their answers. When you offer them a fail in the paper they make you an enemy for the rest of their stay on the campus or start finding some means of changing the grade.

The fact is that the students of our universities and other tertiary institutions today are no more interested in what they come out of school with and the contribution they would make to society but rather what they get from society. Many of them start planning for their extravagant future, while on campus, by joining groups, such as gangs, to be used in defrauding other hard working Ghanaians when they complete their studies. Others join groups like students' leader groups, opinion leader groups and even political parties (Campus wings) with the aim of making some quick money after school.

They are not interested in developing skills that they could use competitively to improve their lots and the nation's development progress but rather thinking of enjoying the luxuries immediately after school. Some of them are being groomed by crooked politicians for their selfish interests. They are encouraged to practice how to be vocal in public while designing methods of being able to convince others no matter what. Such students developed the ability to incite others and influence them to indulge in violent practices that cause mayhem instead of conducting very meaningful researches that would help develop their skills in their area of studies. The major question is therefore whether Ghana has various groups of unemployed youth or rather groups of unemployable youth who cannot fill the "numerous" jobs in the system

It is obvious from our various campuses that there are too much theoretical lessons taught at the lecture rooms than something practical. Many of the academic authorities are only interested in theories and would have nothing to do with practices. Many of the lecturers in various universities have no or little corporate practices and have been feeding students with notes given to them by their lecturers several years ago while they were in school themselves. There is also no collaboration between the academia and the corporate bodies to help give students some practical and hands-on training to prepare them for the job market. The few lecturers who tried to give series of case studies to students to help them improve their decision making skills are regarded by the students as being interested in failing students hence these long and "difficult" cases. Our academic and training institutions are seriously failing the efforts of the youth to develop themselves for the future challenges of our country. It is therefore very important for a drastic revamp of the academic curricula from primary school levels to the university levels. We need to blend problem solving practices with theories at various levels of our child development path.

The National Youth Policy

The national youth council have been playing a pivotal role to design policy and programs that could reduce the menace of youth unemployment in the country. The first two major challenges identified by the National Youth Council which the National Youth Policy of 2010 seeks to address are:

1. Access to quality education for the youth in the educational sector with attendant inadequate or inappropriate training for the job market.
2. Unemployment and underemployment resulting from inadequate and inappropriate training for job the market. The above objectives, among others, are very important and must be pursued very vigorously by current and subsequent governments as we tried to reduce the incidence of unemployment in our country. While this is a national concern and that need various opinion from experts and various Civil Societies, the onus lies on the government to take a second look at our training and academic development process that would actually give quality education and effective skill development to the teaming youth, which is really tailored towards the national developmental needs. The skills development strategies for the youth need to begin from the early child development stages. This implies that our curricula at all levels of the academic ladder should be reviewed critically and drastic changes, if necessary, should be introduced to suit the Ghanaian context. They should seriously be streamlined towards the objectives and developmental growth of the formal and informal sectors of the nation.

Some of the objectives of the National Youth Policy statement for addressing the challenges are:

1. Enable each Ghanaian youth develop his or her full potential and self-esteem.
2. Enable the youth acquire, share and transfer knowledge, expertise, and experience through domestic and international networking and peer-learning.
3. Inspire the youth to develop the aptitude for creativity, innovation and self-discovery in improving their quality of life.

The bigger question however is whether the governments have the desire of seeing these objectives through. The Ghanaian youth cannot develop his full potential of self-esteem when there are breakages in their academic development processes at the lower levels as a result of lack of interest in what they are learning (some of the current things being learnt by the children are really boring). Children must be given proper continuous training, which would incorporate some practical internship, till the age of seventeen at the list or even twenty years. Peer-learning and transfer of expertise and experience is more practical than taught knowledge and therefore there is the need for more practicality in our academic curricula than the current boring books, which

are written with western experience and examples and cannot be understood by ordinary Ghanaian children. Innovations, creativity and self discovery can only be obtained from continuous hands-on training activities. Practice makes man perfect, they say, and continuous practices lead to new discoveries, I believe.

CONCLUSION

The unemployment problem of the country cannot be tackled properly when we always tried to use the same tactics to fight it over the years. We need to change our strategies because those used in the past, which are still being implemented today, do not help and would never help to defeat the cancer. We need vigorous and bold long-term strategies that would help resolve the problem in the longer future if not immediately. The various groups of politicians, with their different ideologies, should refrain from using the unemployment problems as a field for playing their political games.

We also need to see our professional bodies of various fields taking the bull by the horn and collaborate with state institutions to tackle this problem. The professional institutions should be aware that tomorrows' problems which are likely to confront our societies cannot be solved by their current competencies and that new and technologically advanced strategies are needed to tackle those problems. They have a very big role to play by ensuring that individuals who are aspiring to become members of their professional bodies have the fundamental understanding of the economic and socio-cultural problems that are currently confronting the nation and must also have skills and expertise to predict possible future confrontational socio-cultural economic problems.

These bodies need to help develop various strategies in collaboration with the governments in power to help develop the skills of the youth. They need to be ingenious and practical with regards to their role in the efforts to reduce some of these social menaces. And finally, they must desist from looking down with scorn on the recalcitrant behaviours of some of these youth because some of those behaviours would one day affect them severally or individually. In my candid opinion, it is not only the various governments who have failed the country over the years but rather all major players within the economy. The spirit of selfishness has seriously become a cancer in the Ghanaian society and this has unfortunately caught up with the various professional bodies in the country. I believe they are aware of the solutions to most of the problems confronting the nation but most of them would rather sit on the fence than offer ideas and solutions. Those who propose to offer some ideas and solutions to these problems do so by greed and are only interested in the huge financial gains they

intend to make from their involvement. With these selfish interests, they end up undertaking shoddy works when they realised that their financial expectations were not being met by the collaborative institutions. Some of the professional bodies can offer practical training to up and coming future leaders for free on regular basis as their token to societal development.

I hope somebody is listening and would actually do something to solve the problem but not just talking about it or trying to use it to achieve some cheap political avarice.

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