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Innovation and Employability of National Youth Service Corps Members for Sustainable Development in South-East, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the innovation and employability of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members for sustainable development in south-east Nigeria. The research design employed for this study was a descriptive survey. The population for this study comprises all NYSC members serving in south-east Nigeria. A purposive sampling technique was used to sample all 2019 Batch “C” who participated in the Post Mobilisation Workshop held on 27th – 29th January 2020. Also, a simple random sampling technique was used to select 400 NYSC members from each state of south-east Nigeria. In all, 2000 NYSC members participated in this study. The questionnaire that was used to collect data in this study was titled “Influence of Innovation on Employability of NYSC Members for Sustainable Development Questionnaire”. Percentages were used in describing the demographic characteristics of the respondents, and mean ratings were used to answer the research questions. The findings revealed that influence of innovation on employability of NYSC members for sustainable development in south-east Nigeria was positive. The main new innovation to enhance employability of NYSC members for sustainable development in south-east Nigeria was agro-allied. The main employability skills of NYSC members for sustainable development in south-east Nigeria were confidence skills. It was concluded that innovation positively influences employability of NYSC members. It was recommended that the NYSC commission should embark on introducing more innovative skills to NYSC members for them to be able to stand on their own after the NYSC programme.

Key words: *Innovation, employability, NYSC member, sustainable development.*

Introduction

Poverty and unemployment are interrelated. An overabundance of contemporary societal challenges for producing adequate human capacity building and material utilisation are globally unfriendly to human social existence. Therefore, the Nigerian government aims to become one of the 20 most industrialised economies in the world by the year 2030 in its new Agenda.

Achievement of this ambition hinges on the extent to which the country can bring about innovation, and create and nurture a competitive and adaptive human resource base, responsive to the rapidly industrialising and globalising economy. This paper is mindful of the fact that the vision of Agenda 2030 designed by the United Nations is ten years away. The Agenda is a commitment to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development by 2030 worldwide, ensuring that no one is left behind. The adoption of the Agenda 2030 was a landmark achievement, providing for a shared global vision towards sustainable development for all. There is a lofty idea inherent in these programmes, but what is crystal clear is that poverty is still seriously ravaging the land. What becomes more worrisome is the teeming population of unemployed graduate youths in the country.

Currently Nigeria is facing a high rate of youth unemployment in society. To achieve or key into this Agenda 2030, the Nigeria government needs to train the teeming youth in innovation skills in order to reduce unemployment in the society. Innovation in its modern meaning is a new idea, meaning creative thoughts, and new imagination in the form of devices or methods. Innovation is often also viewed as the application of better solutions that meet new requirements, unarticulated needs, or existing market needs.

Higher education in Nigeria is responsible for the training of learners for the working population who have resourcefulness. Therefore, the main goals of higher education as stipulated by the National Policy of Education (FRN, 2013) are for students to obtain skills (physical and intellectual) which will facilitate their being autonomous and valuable members of society. However, Chukwurah and Atah (2017) reported that achievement of these goals is still distant with about 4.5 million youths ripe to enter the labour-force without hope of gainful employment due to a shortage of employable skills.

Yorke and Knight (2006) asserted that employability is a set of achievements, skills, understanding and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations. Toland (2011) wrote that employability skills are non-discipline specific, economically valuable skills required to get initial employment, progress in a job, as well as securing

another job when desired. Orji (2013) described employability skills as the professional competency sought after by employers by means of which students are helped to develop alongside the subject/discipline. In this study, employability refers to the set of skills, competency and attributes that increase the tertiary institution leaver's chances of obtaining initial worthwhile employment, maintaining and progressing in the profession, obtaining new employment if required, and being satisfied on the job. These skills include analytical and problem-solving skills, numeracy, confidence, time management, team working, communication skills, information technology, and monitoring skills.

Research efforts have been made towards unravelling the probable causes of the skyrocketing unemployment among fresh graduates in Nigeria despite the vast array of skills they should acquire in their training. Some of the factors responsible for these causes are godfatherism, fraud, and geometric increase in yearly graduate turnout, among others. A study carried out by Uchendu (2015) also revealed that higher education graduates in this 21st century appear to be lacking in employable skills some of which include the use of the computer, communication skills, ethical practice, teamwork, entrepreneurship, personal management, and leadership skills among others.

The graduates lack the capabilities to be self-employed or entrepreneurs which are needed in society. The lack of required skills has resulted in producing graduates who are more job seekers rather than job innovators (International Labour Organization, 2019). Therefore, one may assume that the goals of higher education, especially in south-east Nigeria, are far from being achieved. To this end, establishments are making efforts to ensure that graduates from various tertiary institutions are skill-oriented to facilitate individuals to be self-reliant rather than the over-dependent on white-collar jobs which is a primary culprit in the strain on available positions.

Chen, Wang, Nevo, Benitez-Amado and Kou (2015) opined that innovation and entrepreneurship education could promote improvement in youth employability. The primary way to improve the employability of the large numbers of youth in Nigeria is a process embarked on through the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) with the fifth objective of the NYSC stated as being „to contribute to the accelerated growth of the national economy.” However, youths in Nigeria are now also realising that equipping themselves with technical knowledge is the surest way to remain not only globally relevant but to be creative like youths in developed countries. Secim (2017) reported that a supplementary analysis of the situation of industry should be done and guidance given to clarify the relationship between employment and an interests-based path of improvement, so as to maximise the

promotional role of innovation and entrepreneurship education in improving the employability of youths.

Adeoye (2015) asserted that Nigeria is a naturally endowed with entrepreneurship opportunities; however, the realisation of the full potential of these opportunities has been dampened by the adoption of inappropriate industrialisation policies at different times. Thaddeus (2012) averred that several policy interventions aimed at stimulating entrepreneurship development via promotion of small and medium scale enterprises, based on technology transfer strategy, have failed to achieve the desired goals. This failure has led to most indigenous entrepreneurs becoming distribution agents of imported products as opposed to building in-country entrepreneurial capacity for manufacturing, mechanised agriculture and expert services.

In other to enhance the employability of the Nigerian youths, there is a need to encourage the entrepreneurial among them. That is the reason why the Skills Acquisition and Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme was established in 2012 to coordinate efforts towards empowering NYSC members nationwide to become thriving entrepreneurs and value-adding employees after their service year. Through SAED the Federal Government of Nigeria introduced the vocational and entrepreneurship development programme to train corps members in construction, cosmetology, ICT, agro-allied services, film and photography, power and energy, automobiles, education, culture and tourism, among others.

Research is being conducted in the Nigerian perspective to evaluate, examine and explore the context of Nigeria experiences and views on employability trends of graduates of tertiary institutions. The justification of this study is premised on the decline in the employability of Nigeria graduates. In addition, there is no correlation between what studied in school and the situation in the labour market. Many industries have argued that graduates are not well trained to benefit national development and were inadequately trained and ill-equipped for work in industry (Brown, Nesse, Vinokur & Smith, 2003; Taiwo-Oguntuase, 2013).

However, there are various studies on innovation and skills acquisition among corps members in Nigeria, which include such investigations as; Adewusi and Adisa (2018) who researched skill acquisition and the entrepreneurship development programme among corps members in Ibadan, Nigeria. The study found that the participation of corps members in the Skill And Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme is affected by their place of primary assignment, instructors, career choice, and most notably, their egocentric reasoning that the SAED programme meant for certain categories of corps members.

Faloye and Olatunji (2018) worked on entrepreneurship education and self-employment intentions among fresh graduates in Nigeria. Entrepreneurship education, risk-taking, and the influence of family, friends, and mentors were found to be significant determinants of the entrepreneurial intentions of selected participants. The study concluded that establishing more skills acquisition and innovation centres across Nigeria will help to equip young graduates with the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required for them to be self-reliant. This development will, in turn, reduce graduate unemployment and criminal activity among Nigerian youths.

Aluko (2014) examined employers' perceptions of the employability skills of new graduates in Nigeria. A qualitative approach was adopted. 32 critical informants from Nigerian National bodies representing employers and Higher Education Institutions and 13 employers were interviewed in-depth. Findings revealed that employers expect graduates to have technical and discipline competencies from training received. They also require graduates to demonstrate a range of broader skills and attributes that include team-working, communication, leadership, critical thinking, innovativeness, problem solving and managerial abilities.

The study by Adelakun, Lawal, Oyegbami and Oyedokun (2019) was on the agro-allied aspect of the Skill And Entrepreneurship Development (SAED) programme of the NYSC programme in Oyo State, with focus on the personal characteristics of the corps members, attitude towards agro-allied activities and impending challenges. To further improve the position of graduate youths towards the agro-allied skill set of SAED, financial assistance, supervision, monitoring and psychological motivation should be advanced upon by all concerned stakeholders during as well as after the youth service programme. This goes a long way to encourage more graduate youths to take up agro-allied business as a profession. Engaging graduate youth in agriculture and retaining them in the sector is a strategy that could both contribute to increasing agricultural productivity and address youth unemployment.

Thomas and Eforuoku (2016) examined the determinants of participation in the Youth-In-Agriculture Programme (YIAP) in Ondo State, Nigeria. A multistage sampling procedure was used to draw a sample of 128 youths. Reports revealed inadequate training facilities as the most severe constraint to participation and participation in YIAP was above average (57.0%). Predictors significantly related to YIAP participation were household size, farm size, years of farming experience, attitude and constraints.

Iwayemi (2013) researched tackling unemployment challenges through coordinated sports and co-curricular programmes in Nigerian schools. Examined was the economic benefit of primary and secondary school co-curricular activities, with particular reference to games in tackling the unemployment challenges in Nigeria. Adebayo (2011) researched higher education and human capacity building in Nigeria. Ejiofor, Oni & Sejoro (2017) studied the assessment of educational and skill acquisition needs of internally displaced persons in Northern Nigeria. A purposive sample was used, with a researcher-designed instrument to elicit information from respondents. Findings of the study revealed that measures of the government in addressing the crisis of internally displaced persons in the country is on an ad-hoc basis with no reliable or sustainable solution in view. Also, the plight of internally displaced persons immensely hinders the developmental process of the region.

Problem of Research

This study has identified that the skill gap which exists based on the labour prerequisites of industries is based on input emanating from university educational management and output from the requirements of industry. Regrettably, this situation slows both economic and developmental growth among graduates. There is also a lack of communication between university education and industry, which this study intends to address.

Research Focus

This researcher investigated the innovation and employability of NYSC members and sustainability in south-east Nigeria. The study aims to provide answers to the following questions:

Research Questions

1. What is the influence of innovation on the employability of NYSC members for sustainable development in south-east Nigeria?
2. What are the innovations to enhance the employability of NYSC members for sustainable development in south-east Nigeria?
3. What are the employability skills of NYSC members for sustainable development in south-east Nigeria?

Methodology of Research

The research design employed for this study was a descriptive survey. The population for this study comprises all NYSC members serving in South-east Nigeria. A purposive sampling technique was used to sample all of the 2019 Batch “C” who participated in the Post-Mobilisation Workshop held on 27th – 29th January 2020. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 400 NYSC members from each state in south-east Nigeria. In all, 2000 NYSC members participated in this study. The questionnaire used to collect data was titled “Influence of Innovation on Employability of NYSC Members for Sustainable Development Questionnaire”. The questionnaire was in three sections. Section A dealt with the demographic characteristics of the respondent, such as gender, qualification and type of tertiary institution attended. Section B elicited information on innovations to enhance employability of NYSC members. Section C gathered information on the employability skills of NYSC members. The response pattern was based on a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA = 4 points); Agree (A = 3 points); Disagree (D = 2 points), and Strongly Disagree (SD = 1 point). Percentages were used in describing the demographic characteristic of the respondents, and the mean rating to answer the research questions.

Results of Research

Research Question 1: *What is the influence of innovation on the employability of NYSC members for sustainable development in South-east, Nigeria?*

Participants’ responses on the influence of innovation on the employability of NYSC members for sustainable development questionnaire were collated. The minimum score, maximum score and range score of the respondents were 60, 15 and 45. The range was divided into two influence (positive and negative), and the cut off was 15. NYSC members with scores between 15–37.5 were regarded as having a negative impact, while NYSC members with scores between 37.6–60 were considered as having a positive influence, respectively, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Percentage Analysis of Influence of Innovation on Employability of NYSC Members for Sustainable Development in South-east, Nigeria

| Influence of Innovation | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------|-------------|----------------|
| Positive | 1502 | 75.1 |
| Negative | 498 | 24.9 |
| Total | 2000 | 100.0 |

Table 1 presents the responses of the participants to items that sought information on the influence of innovation on the employability of NYSC members for sustainable development in South-east Nigeria. The result in Table 1 indicated that 1502 (75.1%) of NYSC members believed that the influence of innovation on the employability of NYSC members for sustainable development in South-east, Nigeria, was positive. 498 (24.9%) of NYSC members believed that the influence of innovation on the employability of NYSC members for sustainable development in South-east, Nigeria was negative. This implies that the overall impact of innovation on the employability of NYSC members for sustainable development in South-east, Nigeria, was positive.

Research Question 2: *What are the innovations to enhance the employability of NYSC members for sustainable development in South-east, Nigeria?*

To answer this research question, participants' responses on the innovations to enhance the employability of NYSC members for sustainable development questionnaire were collected. The data collated from the sampled NYSC members were summed, as shown in Table 1.

Table 2. Mean Rating of New Innovations to Enhance Employability of NYSC Members for Sustainable Development in South-east, Nigeria

| S/N | New Innovations to Enhance Employability of NYSC Members | Mean | Ranking |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|---------|
| 2 | Agro-allied: education and training interested Corps members in the skills in processing and packaging of food | 3.34 | 1st |
| 10 | Food processing/Preservation: organisations teach corps members involved in this about modern technologies, and ways to use them in food processing and preservation and how to do business out of it | 3.29 | 2nd |
| 3 | Artists: at orientation camp artist come to teach Corps members preliminary phases of embellishing pictures, artworks and similar | 3.29 | 2nd |
| 6 | Culture and tourism: Culture and tourism happen to be placing importance on the artworks, relics and attractive centres of a community that raise the interest of tourists | 3.28 | 4th |
| 1 | Automobiles: organisations such as driving schools can be contacted within the state to help Corps members learn the skills of driving | 3.27 | 5th |
| 7 | Education: organisations involved usually educate Corps members who have a passion for teaching, helping them in seeing various opportunities in the education sector and how to make a living from of it. | 3.19 | 6th |

| S/N | New Innovations to Enhance Employability of NYSC Members | Mean | Ranking |
|-----|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|---------|
| 12 | Power & energy: organisations that can educate Corp members on specific ways to generate power and energy. The training includes training mostly how to build solar power systems | 3.12 | 7th |
| 8 | Environment: teaching on the dangers facing the environment are highlighted, and practice in environmental ecology and economics is given, which is vital for most businesses today. | 3.09 | 8th |
| 9 | Film and photography: organisations involved usually teach Corps members how to operate video cameras and cameras | 3.08 | 9th |
| 11 | ICT: organisations that are ready to teach computer skills to students. Some of these skills would include skills on Microsoft office, web design, graphic design, program management and any other related skills | 3.00 | 10th |
| 5 | Cosmetology: works hand in hand with experts involved in the care of hair and makeup as well as skincare and products | 2.73 | 12th |
| 4 | Construction: Some of the training in this section might include bricklaying, the building of houses and roads, and similar | 2.72 | 11th |

Table 2 indicates that 2000 respondents participated in this study. The main innovation to enhance the employability of NYSC members for sustainable development in South-east Nigeria, was Agro-allied, which has a mean score of 3.34 (1st). Ranked second, with mean scores of 3.29, were food processing/preservation and decorative arts respectively. Culture and tourism have a mean score of 3.28 (4th). Next was automobiles with a mean score of 3.27 (5th), education which has a mean score of 3.19 was (6th), power and energy which has a mean score of 3.12 was ranked 7th. The environment was ranked 8th, with a mean score of 3.09 followed by film and photography with a mean score of 3.08 (9th) ICT was ranked 10th with a mean score of 3.00. Cosmetology had a mean score of 2.73 and was ranked 11th, while construction with a mean score of 2.72 was ranked 12th.

Research Question 3: *What are the employability skills of NYSC members for sustainable development in South-east, Nigeria?*

The data collated from the sampled NYSC members to answer the research question on participants' responses to the employability skills questionnaire were summed. The summary of the results is as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Mean Rating of Employability Skills of NYSC Members for Sustainable Development in South-east, Nigeria

| S/N | Employability Skills | Mean | Ranking |
|-----|-----------------------------------|------|---------|
| 4 | confidence skills | 3.33 | 1st |
| 8 | information technology use skills | 3.23 | 2nd |
| 7 | communication skills | 3.21 | 3rd |
| 2 | problem-solving skills | 3.19 | 4th |
| 6 | team working skills | 3.18 | 5th |
| 5 | time management skills | 3.17 | 6th |
| 3 | numeracy skills | 3.11 | 7th |
| 9 | monitoring skills | 2.93 | 8th |
| 10 | collaboration skills | 2.86 | 9th |
| 1 | analytical skills | 2.71 | 10th |

Table 3 indicates that 2000 respondents participated in this study. The primary employability skills of NYSC members for sustainable development in South-east Nigeria, was confidence skills which have a mean score of 3.33 (1st). Information technology skills had a mean score of 3.23, communication skills: 3.21, problem-solving skills: 3.19, team working skills: 3.18, time management skills: 3.17, numeracy skills: 3.11, monitoring skills: 2.93, collaboration skills: 2.86 and analytical skills which had a mean score of 2.71 ranked 2nd to 10th respectively.

Discussion

The finding of this study revealed that the influence of innovation on employability of NYSC members for sustainable development in south-east Nigeria, was positive. This finding corroborates that of Thomas and Eforuoku (2016), who reported that youths have a favourable attitude towards skill acquisition and development of entrepreneurship. This disposition was due to innovations embedded in skill acquisition and development of entrepreneurship, which make them always explore new ideas that will enhance their livelihood activities and make them self-reliant instead of depending on white-collar jobs.

Another finding of this study revealed that the main innovation to enhance employability of NYSC members for sustainable development in south-east Nigeria, was Agro-allied. This finding suggests that respondents were aware of the

benefits of the programme, which yielded a favourable disposition towards the SAED programme. Adalakun et al. (2019) noted that despite the positive disposition recorded, the programme is still not fulfilling its stated objectives. By contrast, Ovwigho and Ife (2009) carried out a study which revealed that the majority of youths had a negative attitude towards agricultural programmes.

Finally, the outcome of this study revealed that confidence skills were the primary employability skill of NYSC members for sustainable development in south-east Nigeria. This finding is in support of Aluko (2014) who reported that employers expect graduates to have technical and discipline competencies and required that they demonstrate a range of broader skills, among which are team-working, communication, leadership, critical thinking, innovativeness, problem-solving and managerial abilities.

Conclusions

It was concluded that innovation will positively enhance the employability of NYSC members and lead to the sustainable development of Nigeria society as a whole. It was therefore recommended that the NYSC commission should embark on introducing more innovative skills to NYSC members to enhance employability and entrepreneurial capabilities after the NYSC programme.

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