

# THE MENACE OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN NIGERIA: CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS

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## ***Abstract***

*A lingering development challenge in Nigeria is a growing population of unmarketable school-leavers and graduates. This study employed the critical and documentary research methods to review the menace of examination malpractice in Nigeria with a view to identifying the causes and solutions. The situation is predicated on the acquisition of unviable education at all the three levels of education: basic, secondary and tertiary. Decorative certificates are acquired, without the necessary skills content. The craze for certificate and white-collar jobs is continually leading to frustrations because increasing number of school-leavers and graduates obtain dysfunctional certificates for diminishing white-collar job opportunities, leading to growing unemployment and poverty. The education system lacks the appropriate education technology (AET), which produces enterprise-ready school-leavers and graduates by enabling the learner to discover the environment and imparts the skills for economic self-reliance and poverty reduction. On the other hand, government measures to address unemployment by changing the*

*education system and curriculum has proved abortive, showing that the problem is that of education system and curriculum. It is recommended that AET should be mainstreamed in the education system to engender entrepreneurship drive and build entrepreneurial skills, instill self-confidence in learners, and empower and position them to tap into the numerous business opportunities around them, especially based on bounteous natural endowment in Nigeria. AET will create functionality, marketability, self-employability, and job creation capacities for self-reliance and poverty reduction among the school-leavers and graduates.*

### **Introduction**

Haan (2007) noted that every few years, human knowledge doubles. Efforts appear to favour harvesting knowledge faster than the mind can process it for the required learning and transformation to take place in the knowledge acquirer. Centuries ago, historian Plutarch warned of the danger of living on a purely informational level, adding that the mind is not a vessel to be filled, but a fire to be kindled. Too much information can be dangerous, as all the ideas can blur together and become incoherent, leaving the possessor unchanged by what he knows (Crowder, 2006). Festus spoke of too much study making Paul insane (The Holy Bible, 1997).

Gyamfi (2006) and Makinde (2007) noted regrettably that every year Nigeria produces 130,000 graduates, out of whom only 13,000 (10 %) got jobs. Others were unemployable graduate loafers likened to a potential army of mass destruction. In a recent research report, 89 % of Nigerian graduates could not communicate in writing (Kawu, 2013).

Sequel to a recently concluded registration of unemployed Nigerians in 8.8 million wards nationwide, the National Directorate of

Employment (NDE) revealed that over 200,000 graduates, with the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) discharge certificates issued in the last five years, are unemployed. This crop of “educated” manpower is roaming the streets unable to help selves, their families, communities and the nation. They remain burdens, instead of assets. Some have resorted to vicious activities, which is why the rate of armed robbery, kidnapping, rape and other crimes has increased sharply. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO),

*The link between youth unemployment and social exclusion has been clearly established; an inability to find job creates a sense of vulnerability, uselessness and idleness among young people and can heighten the attraction of engaging in illegal activities.*

Growing unemployment rate among school-leavers and graduates is attributable to their acquisition of inappropriate education devoid of efficient and functional life-skills for job creation and poverty reduction. They were not taught viable education that familiarises the learner with the environment as basis for self-reliance and functionality in providing bread, securing a sound future and serving as the basis for all progress, for individual, community and nation.

The NDE was established in 1987 by the federal government to empower the unskilled youths and other members of the public to acquire marketable skills that would help them set up their own businesses. The organisation pursues this goal by organising training sessions in collaboration with various enterprises. The defunct Peoples' Bank of Nigeria (PBN) was also set up alongside the NDE to provide funding for enterprises being set up by graduates of NDE training programmes. Sadly

enough, the PBN wobbled and failed to live up to expectation. As a result, the government scrapped it.

The NDE and PBN are both palliative measures for entrepreneurship empowerment of youths who acquired unviable education through their school, formative years. They simply failed because failure is the ultimate destination of all palliative measures, which address no root causes.

At the inauguration of a Planning Committee on National Employment Summit in Abuja in February 2009, the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity acknowledged that unemployment and underemployment had for long constituted serious impediments to national growth and development in Nigeria, adding that the World Bank had estimated that 40 million unemployed youth between the ages of 18 and 25 years were not captured in the employment index of the country. The huge problem of unemployment had assumed a different and worrisome dimension, and Nigeria had been classified by the World Bank as a nation with high exposure to poverty (NAN, 2009).

In a report, the British Council (2009) said that Nigeria could reap an enormous economic dividend from 2030, if it created employment opportunities for the youth - but would face a demographic disaster, if it failed to do so. Youth, not oil, would be the country's most valuable resource in the 21st century. By 2030, Nigeria would be one of the few countries in the world with young workers in plentiful supply. If the country ... improved education ... and created jobs, the average Nigerian could be 3 times richer by 2030 – and over 30 million people would be lifted out of poverty. But, the risks are as great as the opportunities. If Nigeria failed to plan for its next generation, it would face serious problems as a result of growing numbers of young people frustrated by a lack of jobs and opportunities, and could be a force for instability and

social unrest. Nigeria needed to create 25 million jobs between 2010 and 2020, and move its focus away from oil, which contributes 40 % to national GDP, but only employs 0.15 % of the population.

Since the future of the schooling youth is this bleak, children are discouraged from attending schools to acquire dysfunctional education. Consequently, the student population in Nigerian schools either has plateaued or is declining. Boy-child dropout of school has become a worrisome issue (Wogu, 1994), especially in the 5 States of Southeast Nigeria. UNICEF (1996) reported that high drop-out rates among secondary school students, who had become 'street-wise' children, had an alarming national trend. The boys dropped out in order to learn a trade to support the family, in the midst of deepening and widening poverty. Some of the school dropouts became street traders, porters, barrow pushers, motor park touts or house-helpers for the more affluent. In a recent study, Atubi and Ali (2009) noted that majority of the males among the dropouts took to commercial motorcycle or tricycle transportation called 'okada' and 'keke' respectively.

The girls might be pushed into early marriage or end up as prostitutes. Those, who remained in school, often had part-time jobs involving street hawking of bread, fruit, ice-water, groundnut, among others, usually after school and during the weekends. Some female undergraduates became call-girls. These odd jobs left them with little free time for study, hence the high examination-failure rate, which in turn, did not encourage further reading. Having tasted life on the street, some children became too 'wise' for school and their parents. The extra money they gained from their trading or labour might be spent on snacks, clothes, drinks, cigarettes or even illicit drugs. Some even opted to stay away from home, preferring to earn their own living, enjoy their freedom and dream of the day they would 'arrive'. Their thoughts were not surprising in a society, where the

ostentatious display of wealth had replaced intellectual excellence as a sign of success (UNICEF, 1996).

The situation has not changed. Aja (2010) gave a more recent report on mind-boggling statistics of boy-child abandonment of school to operate in the periphery or outside the mainstream education system, especially in the Southeast Nigeria. In 1996, the drop-out rates were 71 %, 69 %, 60 %, 58 % and 56 % for Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia and Ebonyi States respectively, as against 65 %, 65 %, 56 %, 57 % and 60 % respectively for the previous year (1995). Thus, the rates were increasing in all the 5 States, except Ebonyi. On the other hand, the completion rates were abysmally low. For the junior basic secondary education, it degenerated from 38 % in 2001 to 34.8 % in 2005 for Abia and from 37 % in 2001 to 31.8 % in 2005 for Enugu. The rates also degenerated for senior secondary education for all the 5 States, except Anambra, between 2001 and 2005.

Parents identified the causes of high rate of school drop-out as peer influence, unemployment, poor remuneration for educated workers, capacity of illiterate men to acquire educated wives (including Ph.D holders), poor learning conditions, and household poverty. Boy-children gave reasons for high incidence of school drop-out as inability of education to bring riches, poverty that disenables parents to afford school fees for their children, drive in children to make petty cash to augment family income, and training being more appealing than schooling (Aja, 2010).

The current education system in Nigeria has no appeal, attraction, credibility and relevance. Its emphasis is on study of books and charts to fill the mind, like a vessel, with much dangerous information that blur the mind with incoherent ideas, leaving the possessor unchanged by what he knows. Learners struggle to pass examinations in order to acquire

certificates that merely label them as school-leavers or graduates – not the functional certificates that symbolise skillfulness and marketability. This is why examination malpractice in various shades has become the norm for those who have not deserted school, but struggle to acquire certificate without skills.

#### **THE MENACE OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN NIGERIA**

According to Ugwu (2012), examination malpractice is a deliberate wrong-doing contrary to official examination rules and designed to place a candidate at an unfair advantage. It comes in different forms, like the leakage of examination papers, impersonation, external assistance, revealing answers (using dictation, phones and pagers) during examinations, copying or ‘giraffing’ another candidate’s work, inadequate spacing, lax supervision and inflation of a candidate’s original mark by those who grade the scripts.

From the east to the west and from the north to the south, the menace of examination malpractice is echoed in all the nooks and crannies of Nigeria. The disease has eaten deep into the three levels of the educational system (tertiary, secondary and primary). The malady seems incurable because virtually all citizens in one way or the other are involved in the educational malaise. The youths believe they cannot be successful in examinations without malpractice, which they have baptized with so many esoteric aliases, such as ‘symbiosis’, ‘*mgbo*’ (Ibo for bullet), ‘help’, ‘memory backup’, ‘mercenary’, ‘missiles’, ‘giraffing’, ‘dubbing’, ‘xeroxing’, ‘sorting’, among others. The scourge has become the order of the day (Ugwu, 2012).

Inconsistency in government policy and weak political will are not helping the matter. Oyakanmi (2011) reported that the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) has buried two of the most brilliant initiatives

introduced by Mrs. Obiageli Ezekwesili as Education Minister. These are the Community Action and Transparency Initiative (CATI) and the Examination Malpractice Blacklist Initiative (EMBI). Both initiatives, received with joy by education sector stakeholders, were launched in the Transcorp Hotel, Abuja on March 18, 2007. Familiar forces at the FME, with the connivance of a former minister, strangled both initiatives to death immediately Ezekwesili left office. Since then, no Education Minister has bothered to re-examine them. Yet, so much noise was made about the problems associated with corruption and examination malpractice, which were direct consequences of their failure to act appropriately.

The first major campaign against examination malpractice was taken up by the Exam Ethics Project (EEP) founded in 1996, which raised a lot of awareness about the operational mode of the perpetrators. In March 2007, the FME unveiled the Examination Malpractice Blacklist 1 and 2, detailing all those involved in the examination malpractice blacklist (EMB) that had been caught, investigated and then sanctioned. They stood suspended indefinitely as examiners, supervisors or invigilators of FME associated examinations, including those of National Examinations Council (NECO), West African Examinations Council (WAEC), Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), National Business and Technical Education Board (NABTEB) and National Teachers' Institute (NTI). The suspension was without prejudice to other disciplinary actions by FME and by anti-corruption or law-enforcement agencies. Sadly, the reality today is that majority of those listed in the publication were not sanctioned after Ezekwesili left office. In fact, some of them have been promoted (Oyakanmi, 2011).

In a prevalence report on secondary schools for 2007, Gbagolo (2011) observed 16.6 % for the schools in the North Central, 2.5 % for

North East, 3.6 % for North West, 14.8 % for South East, 26.5 % for South West, and 36 % for South South. The results belonging to 32,414 candidates were either cancelled or withheld for cases of examination malpractice in 2009 Senior School Certificate Examination, in which Enugu State recorded the highest of 3,742 candidates (about 10 % of the total casualties). Despite the efforts of the government examination bodies and concerned citizens to stop examination malpractice in Nigeria, people are not deterred from engaging in it. The offences include cheating and disturbance during examination, stealing of question papers, impersonation, obstruction of supervision, forgery of result slip, breach of duty, conspiracy and aiding, among others. The phenomenon of examination malpractice is exacerbated by the large-scale involvement of corrupt and greedy teachers, school administrators, indulgent parents and guardians, students, security agents, examination officials and administrators, host communities of examination centres, traditional institutions, peer groups, and the mass media.

Consequently, Nigeria ranked number one in the world's examination malpractice index in 2011. The average annual examination malpractice index was 12 per cent. In the May/June 2012 school certificate examination conducted by NECO, a total of 615,010 cases of malpractice were recorded, while 439,529 were recorded in the 2011 examination (Omeri, 2012).

At the tertiary education level, 'sorting' is the term used for obtaining undeserved marks in examinations by irregular practices. It takes various forms, including sexual gratifications, financial/material gifts, cult-assisted extortion of marks, among others. Since most students had improper educational foundation at the basic and secondary education levels, 'sorting' is a growing menace as a means of 'crossing over'. After obtaining their degrees, they could become lecturers in colleges of

education or polytechnics. Once they obtain masters degree by the same fraudulent means, they may become lecturers in universities. Expectedly, they perpetrate ‘sorting’ and bake unacceptable ‘bread’ out of their students. It is a vicious cycle, indeed.

As was rightly observed by Nigeria’s Ministry of Education, the education sector is in shambles, and any nation whose educational sector is in crisis can never grow economically. Any country that ignored the leading role of education in the drive for development risked producing citizens who could become weapons of mass destruction. The Ministry then proposed reforms programme to promote education that is, among others, efficient and effective, and functional for life-skills acquisition, job creation and poverty eradication (FGN, 2007). This is in recognition of education as not only a process of transmitting the cultural heritage, but also a means of developing the entire person to enable him live effectively and efficiently in the society and to advance it for the future (Eneh, 2009a).

#### CAUSES OF EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN NIGERIA

Education is acquisition and utilisation of knowledge. It is not a matter of acquiring certificates, but functionality and utility. Meaningful knowledge is not ornamental, but must be utilisable. Knowledge must be acquired for application, not for decoration. It must impact and change the possessor, otherwise, learning has not taken place. Education is a process of experiencing, which transforms and reforms purposefully. It is a process of developing sound character for the good of the society. It is change in behaviour. It is power bestowed on the possessor as the end product of experiencing. As a discipline or a body of organised knowledge, education addresses what should be taught (curriculum), why it should be

taught (educational philosophy), how it should be taught (methodology), and to whom it should be taught (educational psychology) (Eneh, 2009a).

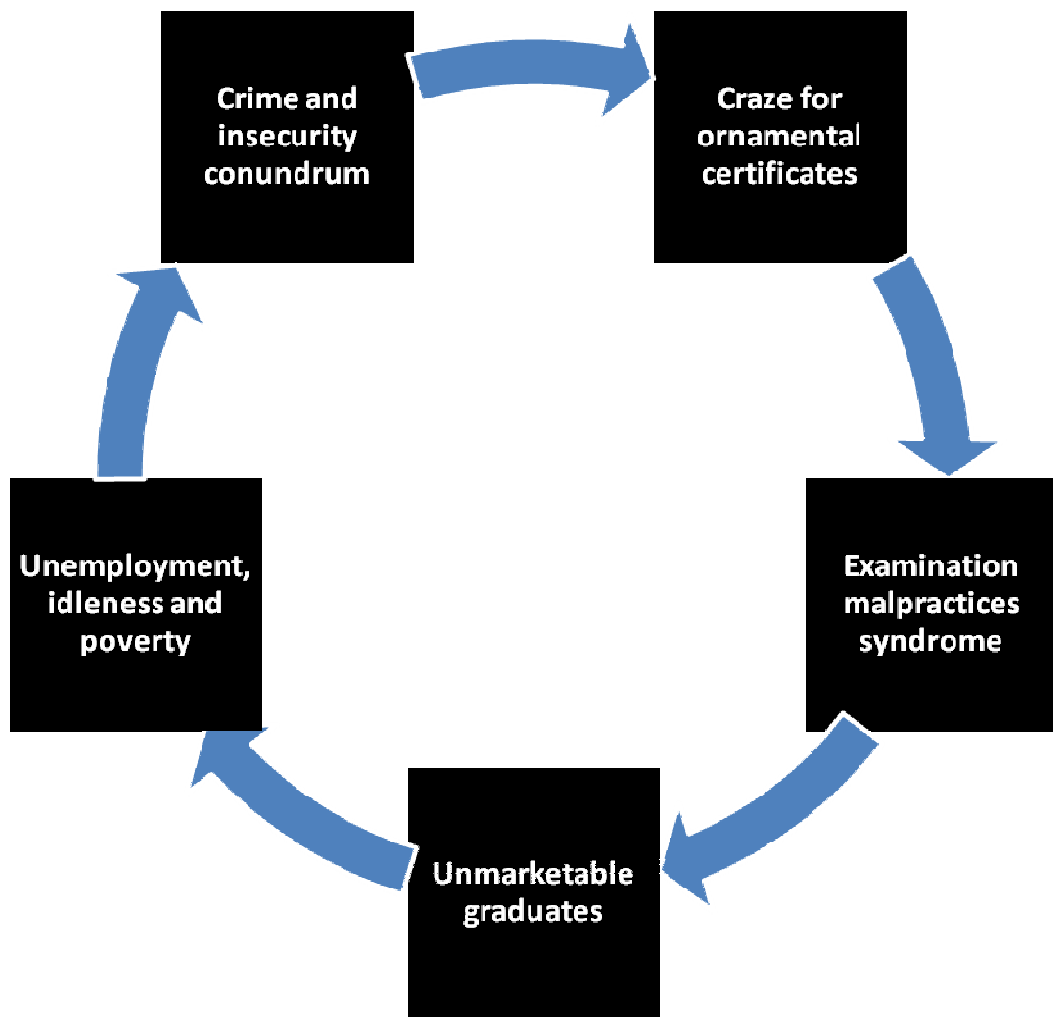
Unlike the appropriate education technology (AET), the current education approach in Nigeria does not use the rich environment as a source of teaching/learning materials to impart on learners the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the world around them through personal contact and experience. Acquisition and application of science knowledge, skills and attitudes for the purpose of improving the environment, and the learners' living conditions is not an issue, nor is any attention paid to human capital development - virile education to develop the mind for sustainable appropriation and harnessing of the natural resources around the learner.

Despite abounding natural resources in Nigeria, graduates are jobless and poor because they cannot tap the natural resources in their environment. Eneh (2007) listed 16 metallic, 21 non-metallic, 3 mineral-fuel and 3 miscellaneous mineral deposits abounding in virtually all the States in Nigeria. Ironically, most graduates of Mining Engineering and related disciplines cannot help themselves by mining them. They rather waste years as applicants for white-collar jobs. They might be ignorant of the existence of most of the minerals in the country because their immediate environment was distanced from their classroom due to the absence of AET in the education system.

Similarly, in a country with abounding and underutilised arable land, a Nigerian graduate of Crop Science roams the streets as unemployed. And, a graduate of Animal Science lacks the skill and drive to employ self by keeping local breeds of livestock even at the barest scale. These local breeds (e.g. guinea fowl, rabbit, grass cutter), can be obtained freely from the environment, unlike the agricultural breeds of animals (e.g. chicks, rabbits). This situation can only be explained on the absence of activity-based teaching through learner investigation,

experimentation, exploration and demonstration in the current education system, which does not adapt the syllabus to natural environment and endowment, nor relate it to local conditions. It does not embrace conservation education to improve natural resource management and reduce environmental damage, hence the increasing disappearance of environmental assets (natural resources and biodiversity) in Nigeria.

Fig. 1 shows the vicious cycle of unviable education and its consequences. The craze for ornamental certificates bereft of functional skills leads to examination malpractices syndrome. This produces unmarketable graduates, leading to unemployment and its attendant idleness and poverty that result in crime and insecurity conundrum. The holders of the spineless certificates can only seek white-collar jobs, since they have no skills to employ selves or serve in the real sector.



**Fig. 1: *Vicious cycle of unviable education and its consequences***

Onuba (2012) reported that experts at a Nigerian Economic Society conference in Abuja in 2012 picked holes in the government's poverty alleviation programmes, adding that the National Bureau of Statistics had said that 112.519 (out of 163) million Nigerians lived in relative poverty conditions. The report recounted about 40 major programmes put in place by the Federal Government since 1982 to address the challenges of unemployment and poverty in Nigeria, adding that they have not made any significant impact on the country's population. Odili (2012) reported that many Nigerians with intimidating credentials are underemployed in jobs that are not financially rewarding to authenticate their (paper, not necessarily skills) qualifications, adding that unemployment is a state in which most people of 20-40 age bracket are living in absolute joblessness. The government should encourage graduates to engage in small and medium scale businesses, and the university curriculum needed to be overhauled to accommodate entrepreneurial courses. But, entrepreneurial culture should rather start from the cradle.

Once the certificate is obtained somehow, the next craze is for white-collar jobs that are just not there, since the job market is already saturated. Using the medium variant estimation to calculate the labour force to accommodate the population growth rate, Adegbola (1998) came up with additional need of 2.6 million jobs between 2000 and 2005, 3 million between 2005 and 2010, and 4 million between 2015 and 2020. On the contrary, amidst growing population, jobs opportunities have been dwindling drastically for various reasons, including privatisation and commercialisation of poorly performing state-owned enterprises (SOEs), which leads to lay-offs. Annual growth rate of small and medium

enterprises declined from 20 % to -2.6 % between 1990 and 1994, and to -0.9 % between 1995 and 1999 due to business unfriendly environment and high cost of doing business in Nigeria. For instance, while the cost of capital (interest rate) is 3 % in the developing countries of Asia, 4 % in Malaysia, 3.9 % in London and 5 % in the United States of America (USA), it is 18-40 % in Nigeria (Eneh, 2005).

Obidi (1995) opined that skills of citizens are core capability that determines enterprise success and a nation's comparative advantage. In agreement, Uwaifo (2009) submitted that vocational and technical skills enhance the relevance and functionality of individuals in the society, promote their economic survival and vibrancy, and thereby, play a vital and indispensable role in the development of the society. Aminu (2009) also stated that skills acquisition boost labour market by empowering the unskilled, poor and unemployable youth for sound social living, thereby, curbing restiveness, crime and poverty. Concurring with this submission, Ogbodo (2009) stated that skill acquisition is an antidote for idleness and makes for self-reliance.

On the other hand, the Nigeria Association of Petroleum Explorationists (NAPE) lamented that Nigerian graduates lacked in the skills required in the oil and gas industry, which actually accounts for about 90% of the nation's revenue base. There was the need to bridge the observed gap in knowledge and skills in order to meet the expectation of employers in the oil and gas industry. In a similar development, the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN) complained that the products of the Nigerian education system were not meeting the needs of its members (*Saturday Sun*, 2007). Understandably, lack of skills render school-leavers and graduates irrelevant and undesirable in the employment sector. In their idleness, they contribute nothing but social vices and

insecurity to the development of the present and future societies (Eneh and Owo, 2009; Eneh, 2009b; Eneh, 2007).

#### SOLUTION TO EXAMINATION MALPRACTICE IN NIGERIA

Since, appropriate education technology (AET) enables the learner to discover the environment and imparts the skills for economic self-reliance and poverty reduction, the mainstream AET can stem the tide of the unemployment quagmire and insecurity conundrum plaguing the Nigerian nation. This is the practical, foundational way to respond to the current wave of public calls for restoring the standard of education. To accompany this step will be refurbishing the entire education system, providing the right conditions for teaching and research, and making the school system once again attractive to foreign staff and students, as these other steps will provide the enabling environment for the functioning of the education system into which AET has been incorporated. That the products of the new generation private schools, which have facilities and expatriate personnel, still lack marketability and enterprise-readiness, gives credence to the claim that AET is the missing link. Therefore, the problem is more of the education technology than other factors. Again, the government age-old measure to address the problem by increasing schools intake for science, technology, engineering, vocational, and technical education disciplines, which was based on the wrong notion that this measure would groom skillful and self-employable products, has proved abortive and give credence to the imperative need to mainstream AET.

Also, the Federal Government has tried to address the acknowledged problem by changing from one system of education to another, to no avail. The country inherited from the colonial masters the 6-5-2-3 education system, whereby the child spent 6 years in primary, 5

years in secondary, 2 years in high school, and 3 years in university. This system was changed in 1988 to 6-3-3-4 system, whereby the child spent 6 years in primary, 3 years each in junior secondary and senior secondary, and 4 years in university. Ten years later (2008), the system was changed to 9-3-4, whereby the child spent 9 years in basic school (6 years in primary + 3 years in junior secondary), 3 years in senior secondary, and 4 years in university. But, the problem persists because the issue is not much of the education system. Rather, it is that of education technology.

Again, the recent National Policy on Education (NERDC, 2004) has attempted to modify and quantify the emphasis on improved intake for science-oriented disciplines by providing that not less than 60% of places shall be allocated to science and science-oriented courses in the conventional universities and not less than 80% in the universities of technology. This will equally fail, unless AET is mainstreamed, since science, para-science, technology, engineering, and indeed, all fields of study need AET to equip the learner with what it takes to set up micro, small and medium enterprises in their fields of study or related or familiar fields.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study has observed that the craze for certificate and white-collar jobs is continually leading to frustrations because increasing number of school-leavers and graduates obtain dysfunctional certificates for diminishing white-collar job opportunities, leading to growing unemployment and poverty. The education system lacks the appropriate education technology (AET), which produces enterprise-ready school-leavers and graduates by enabling the learner to discover the environment and imparts the skills for economic self-reliance and poverty reduction. On the other hand, government measures to address unemployment by changing the

education system and curriculum has proved abortive, showing that the problem is that of education system and curriculum. It is recommended that AET should be mainstreamed in the education system to engender entrepreneurship drive and build entrepreneurial skills, instill self-confidence in learners, and empower and position them to tap into the numerous business opportunities around them, especially based on bounteous natural endowment in Nigeria. AET will create functionality, marketability, self-employability, and job creation capacities for self-reliance and poverty reduction among the school-leavers and graduates.

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