

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP APPROACH TO ALLEVIATING THE PROBLEM OF UNEMPLOYMENT AMONG NIGERIAN YOUTH

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ABSTRACT: Many Nigerian youth find themselves idle at home after graduating from higher education due to their inability to secure jobs. Also, a significant number of unemployed youth have chosen to travel to other countries in search of better opportunities, sometimes taking dangerous and illegal routes that have resulted in loss of life. This phenomenon is largely attributed to widespread unemployment in the country. Numerous parents have made great sacrifices to educate their children, and they hold high hopes for their success upon graduation, yet many are left disappointed. The desire to repay their parents for their sacrifices is overshadowed by the frustration imposed by the current unemployment crisis, which is negatively impacting the economy of various Nigerian states. Upon completing their higher education, many young adults become a financial burden to their families, and the shame of having to rely on their parents again is a significant concern for them. Despite this overwhelming embarrassment, many youths feel they have no choice but to pursue quick and often illegal means of income, such as internet fraud and other illicit activities. This paper will examine the concept of transformational leadership, the biblical perspective on

unemployment, the causes and consequences of youth unemployment, and how transformational leadership can help mitigate this issue. It is recommended that pastors, as transformational leaders, should play a role in guiding youth by educating them about God's love and plans for humanity, as well as the dangers of taking shortcuts in life due to their unemployment status. They should emphasise contentment as an important Christian value for young believers and organise workshops through the church that provide financial assistance to help them secure employment.

Keywords: *Transformational Leadership, Approach, Unemployment, Alleviating, Youth*

INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment in Nigeria poses a significant threat to the country's development. The youth are caught in a difficult situation, struggling with the negative experiences of joblessness, causing some to make poor decisions contrary to their values due to the shame they feel from family and friends. Certain circumstances have created challenges from peers who may abandon them or insult them as if they are unaware of their own situations. This dire reality has led many to pursue opportunities to leave the country, often regardless of whether the travel is feasible. Some embark on perilous journeys through the desert to reach Europe, where they risk losing their lives to desert dangers and wild animals, while others perish at sea. Many young people might reconsider leaving Nigeria if the current economic conditions were supportive of their aspirations and dreams. The rampant youth unemployment is a major hindrance to Nigeria's ability to develop, as many talented and energetic young people capable of contributing to the country's progress in areas such as the economy, healthcare, technology, agriculture, and politics are suffering due to the continuous unfavorable conditions stemming from ineffective leadership that lacks vision for the youth. In some cases within the Nigerian healthcare sector, it has been observed that doctors and nurses are leaving the country in search of better working conditions that reflect their contributions to Nigeria's health system. This migration has significantly reduced the workforce in healthcare and resulted in numerous casualties within Nigerian hospitals. If those who are

employable choose to abandon the country, what will happen to the many unemployed youths in Nigeria? The prevailing sentiment now is encapsulated in the phrase "JAPA SYNDROME"; both educated and uneducated youths are restless and willing to do anything to leave the nation.

Upon reflection on this pressing issue, it becomes clear that unemployment serves as the primary factor contributing to the problem. This refers to the circumstance where an individual cannot secure a job. This troubling experience has profoundly impacted Christian youth, particularly among young people everywhere. Ultimately, the unemployment crisis continues to grow in modern Nigeria, and if this situation persists, the youth of Nigeria will require divine assistance to overcome the challenges of unemployment and to prevent youth migration from the country. The objective of this paper is to identify various ways a pastor as a transformational leader can contribute his/her own quota or help to alleviate the challenge of youth unemployment in Nigerian society.

CONCEPT OF TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Transformational leadership has swiftly become the preferred model for much of the research and practical application in leadership theory, as reiterated by Bernard and Riggo (2006). In many respects, it has captivated the attention of scholars, prominent practitioners, and students of leadership alike. The body of research concerning transformational leadership and similar charismatic approaches has expanded significantly. Why does this model attract such interest? One reason may be that transformational leadership, which focuses on intrinsic motivation and the positive growth of followers, presents a more engaging perspective of leadership when compared to the seemingly "cold" transactional approach. Another reason could be the suitability of transformational leadership for navigating today's complex work environments, where followers not only seek an inspirational leader to guide them through uncertainty but also desire challenges and empowerment to foster loyalty and high performance (p xi).

Anderson and Anderson (2001) further assert that transformation constitutes a dramatic transition from one state to another, so profound that it necessitates a

change in culture, behaviour, and mindset; in essence, transformation requires a shift in human perception that fundamentally transforms how the organization and its members view the world (p. 39). Transformational leadership is regarded as a model that induces changes in individuals and social systems. Ideally, it brings about significant and positive transformations in followers, ultimately aimed at evolving them into leaders. When practised authentically, transformational leadership boosts the motivation, morale, and performance of followers through various methods. These methods include linking the follower's identity and self-perception to the organisation's mission and collective identity; serving as an inspirational role model; urging followers to take more accountability for their work; and recognising the strengths and weaknesses of followers to align them with tasks that enhance their performance.

Bass and Riggio (2006) emphasise that transformational leaders inspire others to exceed their initial intentions and often achieve more than they believed they could. They establish higher expectations and typically realise greater performance outcomes. Additionally, transformational leaders usually have more dedicated and satisfied followers. Furthermore, they empower followers and focus on their unique needs and personal growth, assisting them in unlocking their own leadership potential (p 4).

This leadership model can also greatly benefit pastoral leadership, enabling pastors to embody the traits of transformational leaders in order to foster positive changes across all aspects of their pastoral roles within the church and society, thereby serving as true and dedicated servants of God.

BIBLICAL VIEW OF WORK

Folayan (1997) describes unemployment as a condition in which an individual is not currently employed, yet is available for work and actively seeking employment (p.12). Similarly, Arome, Asaju, and Anyio (2014) characterise unemployment as the state of searching for work while not being employed at that moment (p.14). From a biblical standpoint, work has consistently provided individuals with a sense of worth. Manzi (2004) states, "It is humanity's divine assignment to have dominion over

nature and to cooperate with the creator in the ongoing act of creation, thereby offering services to God, others, and oneself, and this understanding helps to clarify the biblical perspective on work as found in both the Old and New Testaments” (p. 103).

a) Old Testament Perspective on Work: The scriptures begin with the depiction of creation as an act of labour performed by God over a span of six days (Gen 2:2). Furthermore, the scriptures record that God fashioned human beings with His own hands, an endeavour that required significant effort, culminating in God's rest after creating humanity. God bestowed upon humans the responsibility to manage and cultivate nature, allowing them to utilize its resources to satisfy essential human needs satisfied through work (Gen 1:26-27, 2:15). Manzi argues that “God assigned a greater value to work than what is typically experienced by those who labor; this is supported by the assertion that work is a fundamental human value established by God at creation, serving as a key aspect of human existence” (p. 104). After examining Manzi’s viewpoint on the significance of work given to humanity, Sherman and Hendricks shed light on an enriched understanding of work among people. They assert that God employs individuals’ labour to address the needs of others; this may be apparent in specific professions, but is equally true for those in secular roles, such as bank tellers, journalists, or street sweepers. Through their work, individuals serve God's people. Additionally, through their employment, people are able to fulfil their own needs and those of their families, allowing them to accomplish something meaningful that God recognises as the originator of work.

b) The New Testament presents work as a pathway to economic self-sufficiency and liberation, as articulated by Paul, in his letter to the church in Thessalonica. The Apostle Paul addressed the issue of some believers who neglected their responsibilities and relied on the church for their sustenance. Consequently, Paul advised, “If anyone is not willing to work, he must not eat, either.” He noted, “We hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busy bodies” (2 Thess. 3:10-11). This passage indicates that laziness is frowned upon, and the community is urged not to support idle behaviour. Paul is also referenced by Manzi, who suggests that he provided further guidance on work,

stating “in the Lord Jesus Christ, we order and earn the food that they eat” (2 Thess. 3:12). Manzi interprets this to mean that “theology has its own perspective on work as a collaborative effort between humanity and God in revealing the possibilities of creation” (p.105).

Moreover, this situation can lead to unhappiness at home, compounded by exhaustion, burnout, and troubling thoughts. Additionally, industrial theology examines the interest level of pastors and the church regarding the welfare of those engaged in work and seeks to understand how the religious community's concerns connect with the daily lives of individuals in the workforce. It also assesses how to survive and prosper in the work environment. Le Bruyns points out that “theologians are often criticised for paying insufficient attention to an area of life that occupies most of our time, energy, and focus (the world of work). We no longer inhabit a 'how do you do?' world, but more accurately a 'What do you do?' world. This implies that theologians must take a keen interest in the world of work, especially as human activities like labor are often perceived as separate from the life of faith, treated as secular matters that are disconnected from God and His people.” G. O Work 1999 further asserts that “our role as theologians in Africa within the workplace is to become advocates for workers. Hence, the pivotal question is how effective is the theological community in addressing the challenges present in the world of work” (p. 240). Therefore, it reflects on the importance of theology, especially among those who are impoverished and have endured past oppression. This theological examination indicates that God is concerned for the unemployed, and it emphasises the Church’s mission towards the young unemployed to improve

CAUSES OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

The problem of youth unemployment is an issue of concern, and in order for any interventions to be successful, it is necessary to fully comprehend the following causes.

1. Migration from Rural to Urban Areas: This phenomenon is often explained by various push and pull factors. Push factors encompass the pressures stemming from the man-land ratio in rural settings and significant underemployment due to seasonal

cycles, which render rural living less appealing. According to the UNECA Report (2024), the extensive geographical mobility of youth in Africa, particularly rural to urban migration, has been affecting youth unemployment rates. Young people relocate to urban centers with the hope of finding better job opportunities due to the higher concentration of social amenities present in these areas. As a result, rural regions tend to be overlooked in terms of the distribution of social and economic resources.

2. In another context, Ikwuba (2010) identified factors such as rising population growth, high levels of geographical movement, and insufficient employable skills as key contributors to unemployment. Substantial population growth could beneficially affect an economy if there are adequate resources to manage it. However, there seems to be an inverse relationship between Nigeria's population and available job opportunities. As the number of job seekers rises dramatically along with the dependent population, the resources to absorb the employable workforce are significantly limited. It is worth noting that although more private and public universities have been established to cater to the increasing number of students, these developments have not aligned with the availability of employable positions. According to Ajufo (2013), while higher education institutions have expanded rapidly, jobs and employers have only grown at a much slower rate. The manufacturing sector, which is expected to remedy this imbalance and accommodate the employable workforce, has been struggling for over a decade. In 2009, more than 837 factories went bankrupt and closed down; nearly half of the remaining companies were deemed "ailing," creating a serious threat to the sustainability of the manufacturing sector in the nation (Okafor, 2011). When this issue is viewed in the context of low domestic investment, it becomes clear why unemployment has persisted (John, 2014).

3. Poor Educational Standards: Some scholars and commentators contend that when it comes to the formal sector, the average Nigerian graduate lacks employability and does not have the necessary skills sought by employers. Ultimately, businesses do not require individuals just to expend their financial resources but rather need people who will help their organisations grow and generate greater profits, as profit is the

primary goal of any business. This issue is often attributed to Nigeria's educational system, which tends to have a liberal bias. The curricula of many tertiary education institutions in Nigeria are deficient in entrepreneurial content that could equip graduates to become job creators instead of job seekers. Access to entrepreneurial training programs, such as tailoring or computer skills, is hindered by the lack of capital needed to start their own ventures following the training. Moreover, inadequate agricultural tools hinder the advancement of mechanised farming. Hillary (2012) argues that the limited opportunities for young graduates contribute to social unrest and violence due to unemployment and idleness, as individuals without jobs struggle to find a meaningful place in society.

4. Inconsistent Power Supply: The reality is that Nigeria is becoming increasingly unwelcoming to investment, particularly due to the lack of consistent power supply and energy crises. Despite various efforts to revitalise this sector, businesses often rely on generators for their operations, leading to high operational costs in Nigeria. Additionally, the burdensome taxes and fees imposed on these companies have made the cost of doing business extremely high. “When industries and factories shut down or moved to more favourable economic environments, workers were laid off, and the possibility of hiring new employees diminished. All these factors intensified the youth unemployment crisis in the labour market” (Adeloye, 2010).

5. Corruption: “Corruption has infiltrated every aspect of Nigeria's social framework, hindering the nation's ability to cultivate a robust economy. Funds have been diverted or embezzled and hidden in foreign banks, while several enterprises and parastatals have collapsed” (Okafor, 2020). Local and foreign contractors have inflated contract costs, depriving Nigeria of over \$500 billion in oil revenue over the past 50 years that could have been used to foster economic growth. “The political elite have failed in their duty because they replaced visionary leadership, policymaking, and strategic planning with mundane monetary pursuits, with each successive government exploiting the country's resources and public trust for personal gain” (Okafor, 2008, pp. 83-92). This situation is debilitating the economy, worsening unemployment, and leading to extreme poverty, hunger, and frustration. Ashinumese (2011) cited President Mohammed Buhari, noting that “corruption is not Nigeria’s primary issue,

but it undoubtedly influences the current unemployment dilemma among youth. Recently, there was a report of a substantial amount of funding being allocated to states to develop infrastructure and create jobs. This is where young individuals with fresh ideas and innovation can fully utilise their God-given talents.”

6. Economic Recession: Olaoluwa (2016), an economist quoted by Oluwaige, explains that a recession has a widespread impact, with rising unemployment resulting in decreased development and reduced consumer spending that affects businesses, leading them to lay off workers due to financial losses. He also noted that a recession is defined by two or more successive quarters of negative Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth. Put differently, economic growth decelerates during a recession. A decline in corporate sales and revenues, plummeting stock prices, decreasing income levels, and increased unemployment accompany a failing economy. It has been observed that during a recession, business sales and revenues dwindle, prompting firms to experience losses and attempt to cut costs by reducing wages or halting new hires, which raises the unemployment rate. A dip in GDP forces companies that are not insulated from recessions to report losses, possibly leading some to bankruptcy and further increasing unemployment.

Furthermore, this analysis argues that both the nation and much of the world are currently confronting an economic recession, with significant repercussions for the youth. Consequently, the researcher acknowledges that the recession has left many young individuals unemployed, while the demand for many of their products has diminished compared to prior levels. Additionally, some companies may be compelled to downsize their workforce due to the recession, directly contributing to higher unemployment rates. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) opined that “the recession caused the loss of 1.3 million jobs” (CIPD, 2020).

7. Lack of Infrastructures: Dike (2009) remarked that "Nigeria as a whole is a consuming nation rather than a producing nation" (p. 34). Despite multiple sectors in Nigeria, such as agriculture, manufacturing, and construction, producing very little or no infrastructure, the needs for various facilities, marketplaces, and other essentials are unmet in every state, adversely affecting the development of the youth. The absence of reliable roads and a consistent power supply has rendered the economy

unattractive to investors. This lack of infrastructure has resulted in elevated production costs, and the decline in investors directly affects the number of available jobs.

EFFECTS OF YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

The following points outline the effects of unemployment that contribute to youth challenges

1. Insurgency: Journal of Emerging Trends in Economics and Management Sciences (JETEMS) reported a decrease in foreign direct investment from USD 8.6 billion in 2009 to USD 6.1 billion in 2010, which is linked to the actions of Boko Haram and herdsmen insurgents, who are mainly youth. They suggest that unemployment has fueled the rise of Boko Haram and herdsmen violence in Nigeria, leading to the closure of educational institutions, factories, and businesses, forcing people to flee for their safety.

3. Decline in Quality of Life and Poverty: The deterioration in quality of life is largely influenced by family income, security issues, tensions, and conflicts, as well as diminishing access to housing, education, healthcare, and nutrition, which ultimately can shorten life expectancy. Currently, there has been a dramatic increase in food prices in Nigeria to date.

4. Youth Migration to Other Countries for Better Opportunities: Nigerian youth are at risk of leaving the country at any moment they have the chance to travel abroad, whether or not it is convenient. This exodus poses a severe threat to the country's progress. Along the way, some people who were crossing the desert to reach Europe perished from wild animals and desert raiders, while others perished at sea. If Nigeria's current economic climate had supported their aspirations and dreams, young people would not have been deterred from leaving the nation.

Nigeria's economy is always suffering from youth exodus; this is because so many bright and energetic young people who would have built Nigeria in all its economic ramifications have been traumatised by the ongoing and unpromising circumstances that have emerged in the country's leadership. Health professionals, including

physicians and nurses in Nigeria, are migrating abroad in pursuit of improved working conditions that reflect their efforts towards the nation's health situation (Osigbesan, 2021). This trend has led to an observable decline in the health sector's workforce capacity and several deaths in Nigerian hospitals.

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP APPROACH TO YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

The transformational leadership approach can be used by pastors in the following ways to reduce the challenge of youth unemployment in Nigeria.

1. Onah, Okwuosa and Uroko (2018:3) articulate that the failure of the government to alleviate or eradicate poverty, which is one of the indices of unemployment, calls for all social actors to be involved in handling the issue of unemployment. However, under the leadership of the pastor, the church must reconsider how it responds at all levels. That is, the church should involve young people in local job programs and provide them with social capital so they may work for pay. This would help build a more resilient and powerful society. Pastors should take urgent steps to assist young people in escaping the unemployment situation, rather than only praying for unemployed people or pitying them.
2. Church pastors do have influence with individuals both inside and outside the church; therefore, as part of their efforts to care and express concern, they should establish a career network for the youths under their direction so that the youth without jobs can be connected. Setting up a bulletin board with a job sign at the top is all it takes to start a church job network. Job seekers can search for openings or even submit their resumes along with their phone numbers. Young people who need a job can post what they require. Pastors can finally encourage an environment where people can be candid about their wants and jobless prospects by implementing a comprehensive online job network system.
3. The pastor can offer free workshops through his transformational leadership lifestyle. He can connect with entrepreneurs or hiring managers to invite them to speak at workshops that can help young people find gainful employment. These workshops can cover topics like job-hunting techniques, resume preparation,

interview tips, using online job boards, entrepreneurship, etc. Free career workshops or even holding a job fair can be a terrific opportunity to support the community in addition to aiding those in the church.

4. A pastor can also establish a relief fund through his transformational leadership approach: Many young people want to start, but lack the funds. Pastors should also understand that when a young person cannot find employment or feed themselves, or when a married youth is unable to support their family, the pastor should act through his church to assist. Pastors can still use the following to assess their welfare and show them love and care:

i. Stay in touch with them, let them know that you and the Lord value and remember them also, constantly feeding them with words of hope to avoid youths from taking detrimental steps in finding means to earn their living.

ii. Gently ask about their physical needs and look for practical ways to provide for them; some unemployed youth are laid-off workers who may not indicate that they need help; it is the pastor's responsibility to ask for them because they would rather suffer in silence. Practical encouragements include identifying needs and providing for them in modest ways.

5. Youth empowerment, according to Jimba (2006), involves different ways the youth can be facilitated to cause changes in their lifestyle. In an effort to develop and empower youth for community development participation, the church pastors should lead the entire church through their transformational leadership. They should collaborate with other stakeholders to plan and coordinate youth empowerment programs that will help them become involved in important community development tasks and be helpful for kingdom work. Initiatives such as life skills training, community engagement, revenue generation, and talent management can readily boost the self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-acceptance of young people in the community. In order for youth development to be considered an essential component of the church's overall strategic vision and strategy, Chigunta (2002) asserts that initiatives to promote youth empowerment programs must acknowledge youth as collaborators in the process. Young people must have a legitimate role in the

governance of the organisation and be permitted to participate in decision-making, particularly when it comes to matters that directly affect them.

6. Using his transformational leadership style, the pastor should focus on developing human capital by collaborating with helpful non-governmental groups that can be of help financially. This implies that the youth educational system, including vocational and technical education, should be changed to help young people gain high-quality applicable skills that will help them take control of their lives and, in turn, aid in the socioeconomic advancement of the nation (Ogunlowo, 1998). It is important to train young Nigerians to have skills that match the demands of the labour market. This implies that the pastor should encourage the church to fully support the establishment of new vocational training facilities to serve as official and informal vocational training institutions for young people, and place a strong emphasis on the youth's future benefits rather than their present benefits. These institutions should be designed to have a functional connection to the labour market.

It is important to remember that job creation is not a direct result of training. Effective training, however, enables young people to take advantage of opportunities in the labour market by equipping them with the necessary skills. These abilities might help people launch their own companies and promote their goods and services. Therefore, fundamental courses in entrepreneurship ought to be taught in secondary schools and universities founded by the Nigerian Church. The church should involve young people in all phases of the decision-making process. Young people's active involvement in social, political, and economic processes will reduce the costs and hazards of exclusion and increase the possibility that youth policies and programs will be successfully implemented. Therefore, it is necessary to implement real policies that will cater to the unique social, political, and economic demands and goals of young Nigerians.

CONCLUSION

From the viewpoint of transformational leadership, the unemployment rate can be lowered when such a leader is genuinely concerned about the well-being of the youth, which is essential for the peace of both society and the nation as a whole.

Thus, it is vital for pastors, with the backing of the church, to establish skill acquisition or vocational training centres using their members who possess expertise in various professional areas as instructors. This initiative will: (a) productively and creatively engage young people; (b) provide them with a legitimate source of income; and (c) present the church with a significant opportunity to reach out to them. The church, through the transformational leadership of a pastor, should approach youth unemployment in Nigeria as a multifaceted issue by considering the roles of different stakeholders. The capabilities and potential of young individuals should be harnessed by churches to create self-employment opportunities. Consequently, there is an immediate necessity to generate opportunities for youth that can have a substantial positive impact.

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