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SKILLED AND UNEMPLOYED AMID INSECURITY: A WORRISOME LINKAGE IN NORTHEASTERN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

Revitalizing, reforming and strengthening vocational and technical education to inculcate in Nigerians relevant skills needed for self-reliance and nation building remains one of the key goals of educational reforms in Nigeria. More than ever, the challenges of nationhood are becoming as glaring as they are daunting. This research addressed the ever-growing problem of lack of skills among our youths. Army of literate, certified graduates without skills and tact are increasingly becoming canon powder for insurgent operations, banditry, kidnapping, electoral violence and e-begging, poverty has become pervasive. The research dwelled of the following objectives, viz: to find out cause and extent of unemployment in northeastern Nigeria, secondly, to investigate the nexus between unemployment and insecurity in the northeastern Nigeria. Relative deprivation was used as theoretical underpinning. Using qualitative method, this paper interrogates the link between these millennial challenges and the type of education emphasized in Nigeria. Published documents were examined, analyzed and interpreted to deduce meaning relevant to the study. Interviews with key stakeholders were conducted and analysed using QDA-Miner and presented in narratives. Undeniably, the problem and the solution are tied to the educational system. The research unveiled that, emphasis on certificate rather skills, politicization of poverty alleviation initiatives and over reliance on military approach to counter-insurgency are some of the major causes of both unemployment and insecurity in the country. In conclusion, unemployment is found to be caused by prevailing number of our unskilled youths who only obtained certificates without requisite entrepreneurial skills. Inter alia, the paper recommends deemphasizing certificate over entrepreneurial skills by accentuating merit, ability, contributions and output in determining employment, placement and promotion. Strengthening the private sector to absorb skilled graduates is considered as necessary as adequate funding of vocational and technical education.

Keywords: Education, Skills, Unemployment, Poverty, Crime

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Introduction

Unemployment in Nigeria has reached an alarming proportion, sending fears to youths, parents and leaders due to the obvious dangers of spiraling crime, poverty and restlessness. The nation faces unprecedented security challenges that knows no bound, understanding which is proving difficult by the day, and containing it a mere utopian expression. Sanity and security being the bedrock of nation building, their absence makes sensible plans untenable, development unattainable, and restoration of the nation's glory a mirage. Partly true, both anecdotal and empirical evidences attached weight to paucity of employment opportunities in comparison to the avalanche of graduates oozed by educational institutions as the main cause of the problem. Another anecdotal claim averred that the type of educational system in operation rooted in colonial legacies of certification instead of talent and capacity, results in the production of unskilled graduates, processed and manufactured through Freire's Banking System of education. It remains paradoxical therefore, that while a large number of idle youths are termed unemployed, they could actually be unemployable due to skill-deficit caused by the Banking style.

This level of unemployment has never been as serious in the 60s 70s and even 80s. In those decades, Nigerians were either engaged in the public service, growing private sector or self-employed citizens in the agriculture, construction or artisan sectors of the economy (Ipaye, 1998; ISHR, 2006). Ojewumi& Olasupo, (2013) also corroborate this assertion that unemployment and its concomitant effects have never reached crisis stage as it is today. The studies point to the increasing rate of idleness in the country and the need to address the challenges.

More than ever, there is need for not only a paradigm shift but also a pedagogical repositioning of the teaching and learning system, refocusing it on practical skills that can make students and graduates productive. The right beginning for such a noble course, must begin with research and innovation to serve as the bedrock for effective collaboration between the intelligentsia and decision makers. This paper therefore, attempts to interrogate the link between Nigeria's rising unemployment and the unhealthy trajectories of insecurity in the country.

Materials and Methods

This paper employs qualitative tools to describe and explain the link between the two variables. The paper also engaged in discourse analysis of existing literature to identify trends in the unemployment situation in Nigeria and beyond. The paper interrogates conceptual and contextual issues surrounding the main variables in the discussion in order to clear definitional hurdles. The imperative of ascertaining the circumstantial evidence connecting unemployment and insecurity was emphasized by combing statistical records of the National Bureau of Statistics and other relevant bodies. Key Informant Interviews were conducted with three staff each of three selected Polytechnics (Federal Polytechnic Mubi, Federal Polytechnic Damaturu and Federal Polytechnic Kaltungo). Additional 8 interviews were conducted with unemployed graduates and 3 more with security operatives to integrate views of relevant stakeholders and validate claims found in existing literatures. Ethical concerns were taken into consideration by obtaining informed consent of interlocutors before engaging them in the discussions after explaining the mission, procedures, dangers and possible benefits of participating in the research. After collecting and transcribing the qualitative data,

coding and analysis was done using QDA-Miner. The results are presented in descriptive explanatory form.

Conceptual Issues

Unemployment defies universality in its definition. Attempts to cross definitional hurdles by organizations and individuals abound, acceptance of such meanings however, largely depends on the angle at which one looks at it. According to the International LabourOrganisation (ILO, 2013), a person is unemployed if the person is (a) not working, (b) currently available for work and (c) seeking work. This triadic assumption that conceptualized unemployment was faced with secondary definitional challenges owing much to breaking down the assumption (c). At what level can people be categorized as job seekers or to what extent must they seek or seen to be seeking job before they are qualified to be termed unemployed? The definition therefore created more questions than it answers. Hussmans, (1994) argued that the criteria of job search cannot be globally the same, because active job search as a requirement to distinguish working and non-working people may be easy in industrial societies where people are largely working in the formal sector and majority of them in paid employment than in rural societies where active job search may not have established criterion and where family labor may be culturally considered a form of employment.

Unemployment, according to the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development), is people above a specified age (usually 15) not being paid employment or self-employment but currently available for work during the reference period. Unemployment is measured by the unemployment rate, which is the number of people who are unemployed as a percentage of the labour force (the total number of people employed added to those unemployed (OECD, 2021).

Cultural peculiarities which dictate contextualization and differences in data collection instruments, conceptual variations, number of observations within specific time span, geographical coverage still remain major barriers to measurement and comparison. Thus, regardless of attempts to universalize the concept, unemployment is still rooted in cultural traditions and therefore more appropriate to be country specific than generalist.

Engagement with unemployed youths and teachers in the selected polytechnics attempts to contextualize the definitions even further to reflect the views of stakeholders in the northeastern part of Nigeria. The submissions vary significantly with some emphasizing the situation of being out of work as enough criteria to count a person as part of the unemployed while others insists that the concept of willingness to work must be incorporated especially considering the emerging trend where youths prefer easy means of earning money through unsubstantiated mining avenues and even e-begging to satisfy the get-rich-quick syndrome. Regardless of the different perspectives, the stakeholders are united in considering it an unwanted condition that is dangerous to the security of their societies.

Security

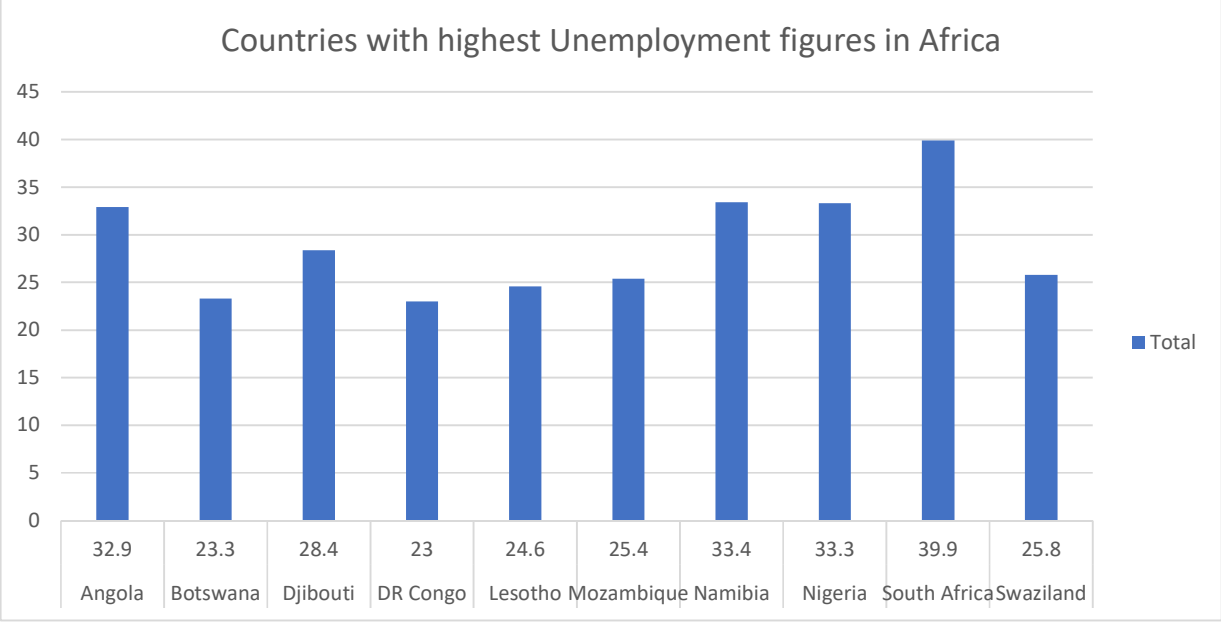
Modern (Human) security involves protecting the citizens from natural disasters, hunger, poverty, diseases, acute unemployment, and arbitrary powers among others. Human security according to Ndubuisi (2017), refers to “the degree to which the welfare of individuals is protected and advanced”. Modern security holds that a people centered view of security is necessary for regional, national and international stability. Thus, without the security of humans, regional security, national security and global security will be difficult to achieve.

Therefore, modern security is specific to national security; this implies that other gamut of security such as food security, social security, job security, environmental security, cultural security, economic security, spiritual security, health security and political security are subsumed into national security. According to UNDP (1994), "the scope of global or human security should be broadened to include threats in seven areas such as food security, economic security, health security, community security, political security, environment security and personal security".

Unemployment-Security nexus

Unemployment, poverty and crime are closely interwoven in a vicious circle where one ultimately leads to another. The counterproductive nature of idleness breeds intensive and extensive poverty which deepens unemployment. Together, the unholy alliance of unemployment and poverty leads to crimes of all proportions and magnitude. Akpan, (2015) opined that insecurity is mainly caused by inability of governments to provide basic needs and address critical issues like unemployment, hunger, injustice and illiteracy and "because the issues are interwoven, one aspect may be responsible for the manifestation of another." Unemployment affects disposable income of the working population especially where the culture of breadwinner is strong thereby inhibiting savings, thwarting investment potential, and aggravating socioeconomic crimes (Nwagwu, 2014; Akpan, 2015, p.64). In Africa, most of the countries with the highest rates of unemployment are at the same time bedeviled with security challenges including insurgency, xenophobia, civil war, ethnic strife, resource conflict and intense poverty. Fig.1 depicts the 10 countries with the highest rates of unemployment where Nigeria has the third worst unemployment records after South Africa and Namibia.

Fig.1: Countries with the highest unemployment figures in Africa



Tradingeconomics, 2022

With the Global Peace Index of 2.467, Nigeria is the 11th most insecure country in Africa after Somalia (3.297), Sudan (3.043), Congo (2.976), Chad (2.963), Zimbabwe (2.799), Ethiopia (2.739), Central African Republic (2.724), Kenya (2.507), Eritrea (2.490), and Burundi (2.479). The commonest issue that runs through all these countries is high level of poverty and unemployment (WPR, 2022). Understandably, countries like South Africa with high unemployment (39.9%), are not on the list of the most insecure nations. However, it is a known fact that South Africa is infested with xenophobic attacks, massive income gap, poverty and intolerance. In another rating by the Institute for Economics and Peace, Nigeria merges 146th out of 163 countries, only more peaceful than Mali, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia and South Sudan. However, the institute acknowledged marked reduction in terrorism in Nigeria despite high economic impact of fighting terrorism in the country which stood at $40.6 billion in 2021 (IEP, 2021).

In developed economies, unemployment among educated job seekers linger for only a few months ranging from one to three months but in developing countries it is increasingly becoming more difficult for educated young men to get employed than for the uneducated. With this, millions of graduates are finding it difficult to secure employment and a large number are laid off especially in the private sector. Together, they constitute a potent force used to cause various forms of insecurity in the country (Adesina, 2013). This situation is worsened by the wrong impression about technical and vocational education where students value certificates and titles than acquiring vocational and technical skills on which they could rely to become self-reliant entrepreneurs (Bello, 2003; Ejikeme, 2014).

Table 1. Unemployment by Educational Attainment

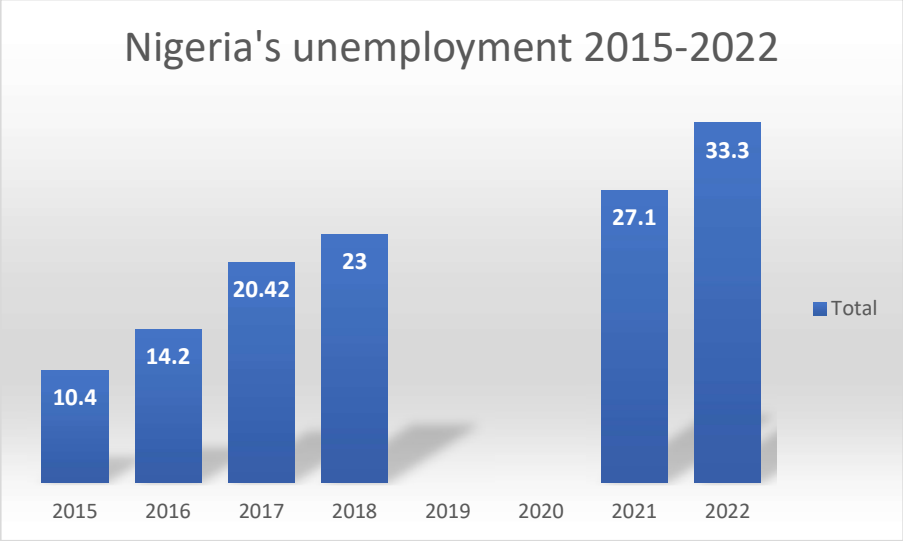
Category	Population	Labour Force	% of Unemployed	Under employed
Never Attend School	15,847,257	3,733,194	23.6	36.7
Below Primary	85,711	39,635	46.2	26.6
Primary	14,831,238	3,179,040	21.4	31.0
Junior Secondary	4,984,100	1,344,603	27.0	31.7
Senior Secondary	28,558,044	8,135,050	28.5	25.0
Voc/Tech/Comm.	281,535	50,367	17.9	26.2
OND/NCE/Nursing	6,530,801	2,009,014	30.8	24.1
BA/B.Sc./HND	6,956,600	2,844,811	40.9	19.5
M.Sc./MA	52,108	119,513	22.9	22.5
Ph.D.	76,526	17,831	23.3	25.2

NBS, 2020

It can be deduced from Table 1 that education in Nigeria is not a guaranteed way of getting employed. Considering the fact that most M.Sc. and Ph.D. holders pursued their studies when they were already employed, it can be observed in respect to the other categories that the more educational certificates one acquires, the more likely one remains unemployed. The only exception is for those that acquired vocational and technical skills. This is basically because job seekers that are out of school system as well as those with low level of education are easily engaged in the informal sector. On the other hand, the formal sector is shrinking due to reduction in manufacturing capacity and the growing incapacity of the public sector to absorb the high number of unemployed graduates.

In Nigeria, unemployment figures keep increasing regardless of the numerous poverty reduction programmes embarked upon by successive governments. In 2020, Nigeria's unemployment rate was 28.5% which rose to 29% in 2021 and reached 33.5% in 2022 (NBS, 2020, 2022). The figures are worst among youth aged 15-34 (34%) especially among graduates that ought to stay not too long in the labour market. Hopefully, the Internationallabour organization believes that these figures could be reduced to 27.1% in 2023 if the right policies are implemented (ILO, 2020).

In 2005, the National Bureau of Statistics estimated 4.5 million new job seekers annually most of whom having an educational level that is below secondary level. As part of the sum, about 300,000 were graduates from the Nigerian University system and the formal sector employed only about 10% leaving the remaining 90% unemployed for several years. This implies that only one out of every ten graduates gets employed from 2005 to 2022 leaving nine out of 10 in the labour market (Nwagwu, 2014).



Sasu, 2022; Clement, 2022

Efforts to address unemployment resulted in the proliferation of duplicate ministries, departments and agencies at all levels of governance targeting the absorption of unemployed school leavers. However, it is glaringly clear that only enhanced private sector could provide enough job opportunities for the populace without unnecessary increase in government expenditure. Regrettably, the private sector has been experiencing setbacks over the years.

The manufacturing sector has been consistently collapsing due to the high cost of doing business in the country, poor energy supply, shortage of infrastructure, poor skills development including the cost of retraining graduates to fit the needs of the industries. Thus, the private sector that is expected to drive the employment generation is largely moribund and dysfunctional. Okafor, (2011, p9) observes:

> There is no vibrant manufacturing sector which has the capacity to absorb unemployed youths in Nigeria. There are over 800 collapsed industries in Nigeria and over 37 factories closed shops in 2009. About half of the remaining operating firms have been classified as "ailing," a situation that poses a great threat to the survival of manufacturing in the country in the next few years. According to a survey carried out as part of its membership operational audit in January 2010 by the Manufacturers Association of Nigeria (MAN), the 834 figure represents the cumulative aggregate of firms that have shut down their operations in 2009 across the country. The MAN survey usually covers five manufacturing enclaves, into which the country is divided, in terms of manufacturing activities. These include the Lagos, northern, southeast, south-south and southwest areas. The report of the survey showed that in 2009, a total number of 176 firms became terminally sick and collapsed in the northern area. In the southeast area, a total number of 178 companies were shut down during the period. While in the south-south area, 46 companies shut down operations before December 2009. According to the survey, the southwest area, lost 225 companies during the year. It said that the Lagos area, followed closely with 214 manufacturing firms closing shop before the end of 2009.

Table 2: States with highest/lowest unemployment rates

States with the highest unemployment rates	%	States with the lowest unemployment rates	%
Imo	48.7	Oyo	16.4
Akwa Ibom	45.2	Ogun	16.3
Rivers	43.7	Kebbi	16.1
Delta	40.3	Nasarawa	16.0
Kaduna	39.8	Ekiti	15.5
Taraba	39.4	Osun	15.3
Abia	35.5	Ebonyi	14.6
Plateau	35.2	Zamfara	14.0
Niger	33.8	Kwara	13.8
Gombe	33.3	Anambra	13.1

NBS, 2020

Unemployment rate by states reveals a link between insecurity and idleness in the country. Most of the states with the highest levels of unemployment are in serious security problems, while most of the states with the least unemployment figures are relatively more peaceful.

Triggers of Unemployment and insecurity in Northeast Nigeria

Engagements with interlocutors revealed significant link between unemployment and insecurity in the region. Several causes of unemployment and insecurity in Nigeria are identified in the discussions including but not limited to:

i. Politicization of poverty reduction programmes: Successive governments at Federal and State Levels embarked on poverty alleviation programmes notably the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Youth Enterprises with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWin), Subsidy Reinvestment Programme (SURE-P), N-Power, Trader-Money, NIRSAL, . This list, is an addition to the efforts of established agencies such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) and the likes. However, these programmes are often hijacked by politicians to reward political supporters, and serve nepotic connections.
ii. Political Discontinuity: Programmes that were highly promising were often discontinued not only when new parties come to power but even when power change hands among same party faithfuls.
iii. Poor Funding of, Technical, Vocational and Entrepreneurial education: Institutions offering technical and vocational courses are grossly underfunded making them incapable of acquiring state of the art equipment and facilities to teach the right skills.
iv. Poor attitude towards TVET programmes: Youth consider TVET skills too artisan for their liking. Students' mindsets are fixed at white collar jobs and consider vocational skills as exclusive reserve of the underprivileged class. Their high ambitions often result in internet fraud, terrorism, and kidnapping.
v. Lack of Modern skills in Entrepreneurship Centers of Tertiary Institutions: Respondents especially among unemployed graduates opined that the centres are failing to attract requisite attention of students because they are not teaching new generation businesses especially techpreneurial skills such as App development, biotech and e-commerce services.
vi. The Almajiri System of Education: It is observed that the Almajiri system of education emphasized memorization of the Holy Quran without emphasis on means of earning a living for the graduates. At adulthood however, their strong desire for comfort without employable skills leads them to frustration if not depression making them ready-soldiers for atrocities.
vii. Emphasis on Certificate over skills: Nigerian education system emphasizes grades over and the labour market recognizes certificates at the expense of competence. This makes the training institutions to encourage banking system of education where student memorize facts and vomit them on examination scripts to get marks and pass examinations. Neither the students nor the institutions place adequate emphasis on practical skills.
viii. Weak Private Sector: The private sector is grossly weak as more factories are closing down due to difficult business environment. Hence, graduates and other job seekers finds it difficult to be absorbed in the formal sector. Government-owned corporations are mismanaged to extinction by political office holders which worsens the situation through retrenchment of workers.

ix. Poor parenting: A large number of parents are sending children to the streets to fend for themselves at very tender age which makes the children vulnerable to negative influence by unscrupulous adults thereby paving way for child abuse, trafficking, and violence especially recruitment into the ranks of insurgents and bandits as child-soldiers. In the same vein, some parents continue to pamper their children up to the age they would ordinarily be expected to fend for themselves. Allowing them to rely on parents for everything makes them lazy and unexposed to realities of life.

x. Lack of Academia-Industry Partnership: Another cause for unemployment is the absence of collaborative linkages between academia and the industry. Sometimes, the training given in the institutions do not match the expectations of the industries. In most cases, companies organize special training for new hires to instill the requisite practical skills.

Conclusion

Interrogating the rising unemployment figures and its link to prevailing insecurity in northeastern states of Nigeria reveals the imperatives of nonmilitary approach to the fight against crime. Dearth of employment opportunities and its concomitant security challenges are also not unconnected with the collapsing private sector and the politicization of poverty alleviation initiatives by governments and nongovernmental organizations. Poor parenting, indiscipline among youths, improperly organized Almajiri system of education, poor attitude to TVET programmes and inadequate funding of technical and vocational training institutions are identified as the roots of unemployment and insecurity in northeastern Nigeria.

Recommendation

With the foregoing, the paper offers the following recommendations:

The Federal and state governments should adhere to the civil services principles of merit based decision making, impersonality and impartiality to avoid politicization of poverty alleviation programmes. Independent Corruption Practices and other Related Offenses Commission (ICPC) should closely monitor recruitment exercises and poverty alleviation programmes to ensure that emphasis is placed on merit and competence.

The Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TetFund) should increase its funding of entrepreneurship centers of tertiary institutions to enable them acquire modern equipment and engage capable resource persons to train youths. Funding of other state owned TVET centers should also be improved in order to take as much youths as possible off the streets.

The National Orientation Agency, parents, NGOs, community leaders and youths associations should engage in widespread advocacy to change the mindset and disposition of youths towards vocational and technical skills. Youths should be made to understand the potentiality of self-reliance embedded in the TVET training programmes.

The Federal government's Almajiri programme in liaison with the state governments and the Ulama should reorganize the Almajiri system of education to accommodate skill acquisition programmes to enable the children acquire the necessary skills to support livelihood. The system should also be regulated to ensure control, record keeping and standard.

Employers should deemphasize certificates in favor of actual competence, skills, and integrity. This should tested through practical examinations instead of presentation of original credentials as obtainable being practices by most employers. This is expected to make students focus on acquiring the needed skills than grades.

The entrepreneurship centers in tertiary institutions should consider the introduction oftechpreneurship and other modern e-business platforms to conform with the present generational shift in trade activities. This should be in addition to the existing programmes like Tailoring, bricklaying, brickmaking, catering, satellite installations etc.

The Federal government should create conducive environment for investment in order to encourage private sector development. Lowering interest rate on loans, power sector reforms, provision of essential infrastructure, tax-waiver for essential industries and encouraging the importation of essential machineries.

Families and communities must take responsibility of feeding, clothing and training their children and wards. There is need for legislation to prohibit child-begging in order to force parents to be responsible and responsive.

The Industrial Training Fund (NITF), Manufacturing Association of Nigeria (MAN), Nigerian Employers Consultative Association (NECA), and the relevant agencies of the Ministry of Labour and Productivity should consider avenues of ensuring academia-industry partnership. The industry should have a say in coming up with school curricular as well as how those programmes should be taught. There should also be regular contact between the academia, policy makers and the industry to create understanding, satisfy expectations and ensure fruitful collaboration.

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