

**PRINCE ABUBAKAR AUDU UNIVERSITY,  
ANYIGBA, KOGI STATE, NIGERIA**

**17<sup>TH</sup>**

**INAUGURAL LECTURE**

***DECOMPRESSING THE COMPLEXITIES OF  
CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN  
EMPLOYMENT DYNAMICS***

**BY**

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**PROFESSOR OF HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT AND  
LABOUR DYNAMICS**

**Tuesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 2025**

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**Being the next of the**

**17<sup>TH</sup> INAUGURAL LECTURE**

**Delivered**

**@**

**Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba,**

**Nigeria**



**JOHNSON JUWON ORUGUN**

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## NATIONAL ANTHEM

Stanza I      Nigeria, we hail thee,  
Our own dear native land,  
Though tribe and tongue may  
differ,  
In brotherhood we stand  
Nigerians all, are proud to serve  
Our sovereign Motherland.

Stanza II     Our flag shall be a symbol  
That truth and justice reign,  
In peace or battle honoured,  
And this we count as gain,  
To hand on to our children  
A banner without stain.

Stanza III    O God of all creation,  
Grant this our one request:  
Help us to build a nation  
Where no man is oppressed,  
And so with peace and plenty  
Nigeria may be blessed.

**PRINCE ABUBAKAR AUDU UNIVERSITY,  
ANYIGBA ANTHEM**

Prince Abubakar Audu State University, you stand in strength  
and pride

Showing the way for all who yearn

Standing firm in wisdom and truth

In Unity we grow

Committed to imparting knowledge, skills and learning

To all who long for excellence

Prince Abubakar Audu University, the pride of the world

We honour your virtues.

**TABLE 1: PRECEDING INAUGURAL LECTURES OF PRINCE  
ABUBAKAR AUDU UNIVERSITY, ANYIGBA**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>INAUGURAL LECTURERS</b>	<b>TITLE</b>	<b>DATE</b>
1	Professor Sunday S. Arogba	Phenolics: A Class of Nature's Chemical Weapons of Self-Preservation	26 <sup>th</sup> August, 2008
2	Professor Zacchaeus O. Apata	Unburdening the Colonial Burden: Lessons from History	17 <sup>th</sup> August, 2010
3	Professor Steve Metibiba JP	Matrimony Between Two Healthcare System: An Unholy Wedlock?	27 <sup>th</sup> June, 2014
4	Professor Stephen I. Ocheni	Accounting for Public Funds: The Leviathan of Government Bureaucracy	28 <sup>th</sup> June, 2018
5	Professor Eniolorunda A. Tai Oluwagbemi	Scientific Elegance and Political Naivety of Food and Wood Sufficiency in Nigeria: The Take of an Agroforester	28 <sup>th</sup> June, 2018
6	Professor Charles I. Oyewole	Coroner's Inquest: An Autopsy of the Man with the Hoe	15 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
7	Professor Odin Eboh Monday	Insanity and Life Pain Two Ancestral Curses: The Role of Village Herbalist	24 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019

8	Professor Jimoh Habibat Isah	The Geography of Erosion in Nigeria: An Explanation	30 <sup>th</sup> August, 2019
9	Professor Marietu Ohunene Tenuche	Neoliberalism: Forecasting Nigeria's Ungodly Romance with the East	29 <sup>th</sup> September, 2020
10	Professor James Omale	Remedy or Poison? Double- Edge Sword Paradox of Alternative Medicine: The Concern of Toxicologist	11 <sup>th</sup> March, 2021
11	Professor Stephen Jimoh Ibitoye	If Agricultural Revolution is the Answer, What is the Question?	20 <sup>th</sup> September, 2022
12	Professor Enejo Simon Attah	Intercropping: That there may be Enough Food	19 <sup>th</sup> February, 2025
13	Professor Cornelius Ojo Orishagbemi	Food Research Innovations as Panacea for Post- Harvest Losses, Food Security and Safety: Renown Contributions of a Certified Scientist	7 <sup>th</sup> August, 2025
14	Professor Daniel Friday Atidoga	The Annihilator's Sexual Intent: The Crime of Crimes and Demise of Tomorrow	13 <sup>th</sup> September, 2025

15	Professor Faith Aladi Sale	Agroforestry: The Magic Bullet for Agricultural Land Degradation and Food Insecurity	18 <sup>th</sup> November, 2025
16	Professor Patrick L. I. Ukase	Does History Really Matter? Knowledge and the Historian in a Society in Transition	25 <sup>th</sup> November, 2025

## **PROTOCOL**

The Visitor to the University, His Excellency Alhaji Usman Ahmed Ododo

The University Governing Council Chairman and Members

The Vice Chancellor

The Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic)

The Registrar

The Bursar

The University Librarian

Provost, College of Health Sciences

Dean, School of Postgraduate Studies

Dean, Faculty of Management Sciences, other Deans and Directors

Heads of Departments and Heads of Units

Professors and Members of the University Senate

Academic and Non-Academic Staff

Chairman and Members of Inaugural Lecture Committee

Past Inaugural Lecturers

My Dear Wife, Children and Siblings

My Family Members and Well-Wishers

Friends of the University

My Lords Spiritual and Temporal

Gentlemen of the Print and Electronic Media

Staff and Students of Business Administration

Staff and Students of Faculty of Management Sciences

Staff and Students of the University

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning

## **PREAMBLE**

It is a great privilege and honour to deliver the seventeenth Inaugural Lecture of Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba. This lecture is the first from the Department of Business Administration and second from the Faculty of Management Sciences.

Inaugural Lecture is an academic exercise and a very important occasion in the ivory tower during which an academic occupying a Professorial Chair in his/her area of specialization, summarises his or her research findings over the years and present same to an intellectual, interested audience and the larger society with a view to providing solutions to the never-ending societal problems.

My Professorial position at the Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Management Sciences, in this citadel of learning did not come by accident, but by the divine grace of God Almighty. Jeremiah 29:11 of the Holy Scripture:

*For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end.*

The Vice Chancellor, Ma, it may interest you to know my academic sojourn. I attended United Primary School, Iffe, Ikoyi, Ijumu Local Government, Kogi State between 1972- and 1977. I proceeded to St. Augustine's College Kabba between 1977 and 1982. I proceeded to Kwara State College of Technology, Ilorin for H.Sc., GCE/IJMB Advanced Levels between 1982 and 1984. I, thereafter, proceeded to Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria between 1984 and 1987 for B.Sc. Political Science. Then, went

to the University of Lagos, Akoka between 1989 and 1991 for M.Sc. in Industrial Relations & Human Resource Management and later Kogi State University, Anyigba now Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba for my Ph.D. in Management with specialisation in Human Resource Management and Labour Dynamics between 2009 and 2013.

I joined the services of Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba in 2000 as an Assistant Registrar (Non-Academic Staff). God redirected my path into the academics in 2002 as an Assistant Lecturer, and I rose steadily through all ranks to become a Professor of Human Resource Management and Labour Dynamics in the year 2020.

### **Going Down Memory Lane**

The Vice Chancellor, Ma, I crave your indulgence to let me begin my lecture by going down the memory lane and make a brief remark about my personal life and activities in this great institution of learning, Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba. I wish to give this audience a synopsis of my background that culminated in today's lecture and my interest in Human Resource. I was born into the family of late Pa Timothy Ihinmikalú Orugun and Mrs. Comfort Ebunoluwa Orugun of Ikoyi, Ijumu Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria. I was born into a family of Nine, of which four of us were male and five others were female siblings of mine.

## **My Service**

The Vice Chancellor, Ma, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I have served this institution, the State and also gained recognition at National and international levels in the following capacities before and after my appointment in 2000 to date: My job career commenced with the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) as a Teacher at Tincan Island High School, Apapa, Lagos. I thereafter had working stints with Private organizations ranging from Finance to Management Consultancy, and the Hospitality Industries, including being the General Manager of the prestigious Lagos Country Club, Ikeja-Lagos from 1993 through 1997.

I joined the services of Kogi State University, Anyigba now Prince Abubakar Audu University, Anyigba, as one of the pioneer staff in the year 2000 as an Assistant Registrar, before being converted to the rank of an Assistant Lecturer in the Year 2002, from where I rose through the ranks to my current position as a Professor, since the year 2020. I have enjoyed the membership of several professional bodies, including the Nigerian Institute of Management (NIM), the Nigerian Industrial Relations Association (NIRA) and the Chartered Institute of Personnel Management of Nigerian (CIPMN), where I rose to become Chairman of the Kogi State Chapter (2015-2016). I am also a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Entrepreneurs of Nigeria (FICEnt), International Institute of Global Affairs and the Institute of Management Consultants. Besides my experienced-driven scientific publications, I have a special interest in Employment Studies and Entrepreneurship

Interventions in Nigeria. I have participated in several focused group discussions on the unemployment situation in Nigeria, as powered by the Federal Ministry of Labour and Productivity in partnership with the CIPMN. I am an External Facilitator and Examination Assessor for the National Open University (NOUN), Abuja, Lokoja and Iyara Centres. I am equally a Visiting Professor at Federal University, Lokoja and Veritas University, Abuja, and an External Examiner to the University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria, Salem University, Lokoja, Kogi State and Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, among others.

I have provided invaluable Secretariat support (as a secretary) to over twenty-eight (28) Committees and fora from (2000 to 2002) before being converted to an academic staff member as an Assistant Lecturer. By the grace of God, I have moved round in the academia from being a pioneer lecturer in the Department of Management, to Level Adviser across different levels, Departmental Project Coordinator, Postgraduate Coordinator, Examination Officer, Deputy Director, Director, Head of Department for 4 sessions, Acting Deputy-Dean for 4 sessions and substantive Dean of Faculty of Management Sciences from March 2024 to April 2025, before my present appointment as the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Administration) of the University.

I am blessed with a wonderful spouse and three biological and several other foster children. I am a strong believer in the Nigerian Project and resiliently committed to bettering society, locally and globally through good Community and National Services.

# **NOW THE LECTURE**

## **DECOMPRESSING THE COMPLEXITIES OF CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN EMPLOYMENT DYNAMICS**

The Vice Chancellor, Ma, it is with profound humility and deep gratitude that I stand before this distinguished assembly to deliver this inaugural lecture titled “Decompressing the Complexities of Contemporary Nigerian Employment Dynamics.” Permit me to first express my appreciation to the Almighty God for the gift of life, wisdom, and grace to contribute to the pursuit of knowledge in this great institution. I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the Vice-Chancellor for the opportunity to share my reflections on a subject that sits at the heart of Nigeria’s socio-economic transformation agenda, employment and the dignity of labour.

## **ORIGIN AND MODERN FEATURES OF HUMAN RESOURCE AND LABOUR DYNAMICS**

The Vice Chancellor Ma, the study of Human Resource (HR) and Labour Dynamics is essential, integrating aspects of industrial relations, organizational behavior, economics, sociology, and public policy. I have provided a brief introduction to the management, deployment, compensation, and regulation of human capital in both formal and informal economic sectors for the purpose of this lecture. The evolution of HR and labour dynamics, from classical labour relations to a strategic, data-driven function, significantly influences employment, productivity, and organizational performance on a global scale

(Kakepota & Atif, 2024; Okon *et al.*, 2024), including national contexts such as Nigeria.

The historical origins of human resource and labour dynamics reflect a significant evolution from informal, kinship-based systems to formalized, institutional practices. In pre-industrial agrarian societies, labour primarily revolved around subsistence, was familial in nature, and regulated by communal or caste norms, which lacked formal employment or wage systems. The Industrial Revolution, occurring in the 18th and 19th centuries, represented a significant transformation in which labour was commodified, with workers exchanging their labour for wages in increasingly mechanized factories. This period led to extensive manufacturing, requiring enhanced workforce coordination and oversight, and prompted the establishment of labour unions in reaction to exploitative conditions. Employers recognized the strategic significance of personnel management in minimizing turnover and overseeing discipline (Apalia, 2017; Chukwunonso, 2022; James, 2020).

The early 20th century introduced Frederick W. Taylor's Scientific Management, aimed at optimizing labour via task specialization, time-motion studies, and standardized work procedures (Lal, 2024). This approach established the groundwork for contemporary HR systems, notwithstanding criticisms regarding worker alienation. The Human Relations Movement, influenced by Elton Mayo's Hawthorne Studies, subsequently shifted focus to the psychological and social needs of employees, recognizing that motivation, morale, and group dynamics significantly impact productivity. This resulted in the

creation of employee welfare programs and engagement strategies. Following World War II, human resource functions were formalized within growing corporate frameworks, facilitated by the development of labour laws, collective bargaining systems, and welfare policies (Payne, 2023). In newly independent countries such as Nigeria, this period witnessed the establishment of formal labour institutions, trade unions, and systems for industrial dispute resolution, signifying the complete emergence of human resource management as a crucial organizational and socio-economic function. This is in consonance with Taylorism, also known as scientific management, is a management theory developed by Frederick Winslow Taylor in the early 20th century. The core idea behind Taylorism is to enhance worker efficiency by breaking down complex tasks into simpler, manageable parts and optimizing factory layouts (Payne, 2023). This is illustrated in the figure 1 below:

### Frederick Taylor Scientific Management

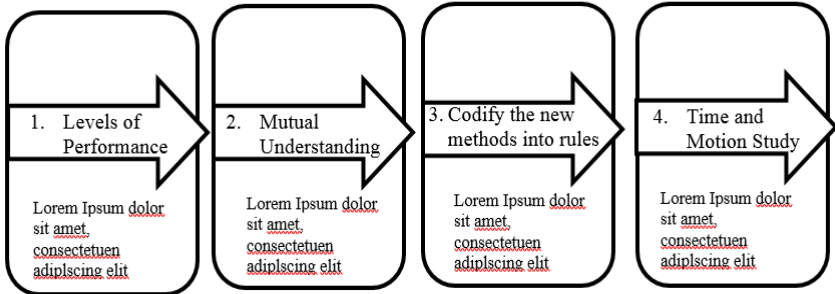


Figure 1: Fredrick Taylor’s scientific management

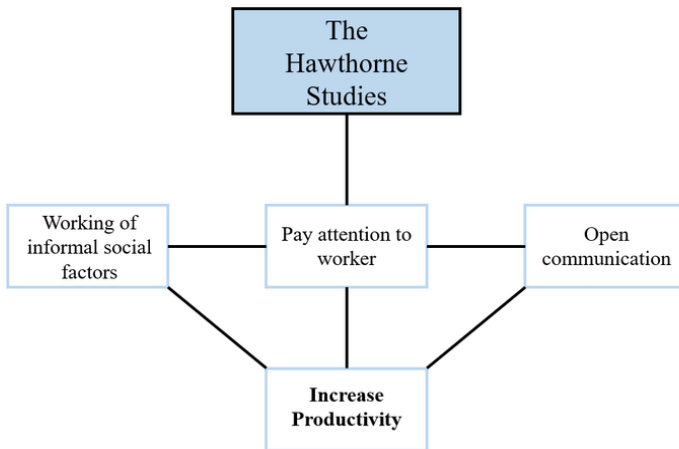


Figure 2: Elton Mayo’s Hawthorne studies theory

The evolution of strategic human resource management (SHRM) from the 1980s to the 2000s represents a significant transformation of HR's role within organizations, shifting from a limited administrative function to a key strategic component that contributes to organizational success. The transformation was driven by the acknowledgment of human capital as a crucial source of competitive advantage, with prominent scholars such as Gary Becker redefining HR as an area of capital investment that produces quantifiable returns in innovation and productivity. Organizations initiated the alignment of employee objectives with overarching corporate strategies via performance-based systems, while adopting decentralization and flexible work structures that fostered autonomy and responsiveness.

Globalization transformed the operational landscape, with firms extending their reach across borders, implementing transnational employment practices, and increasingly outsourcing HR functions to enhance efficiency (Groenewald *et al.*, 2024; Tongo *et al.*, 2025). The shifts established a foundation for contemporary human resource and labour dynamics, influenced by intricate technological, economic, and social transformations. Digitalization is pivotal, as organizations implement AI-driven recruitment systems, digital learning platforms, and sophisticated performance analytics, while also adjusting to the emergence of platform-based gig work that challenges conventional employment contracts (Evans-Uzosike & Okatta, 2023; Sharma & Longani, 2025).

The informal and gig economies, particularly prominent in developing nations such as Nigeria, disrupt traditional

employment standards and necessitate innovative HR frameworks that provide short-term flexibility while safeguarding against exploitation, including portable benefits and worker protections. Strategic talent management has become a primary focus, emphasizing talent acquisition, succession planning, and ongoing reskilling to align with changing business requirements. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) have become essential components of HR strategies, as organizations adopt policies that promote gender balance, address discrimination, and foster inclusive leadership, thereby improving ethical integrity and organizational innovation (Orugun *et al.*, 2019).

Employee engagement has developed to include psychological safety, mental health, and purpose-driven work cultures, acknowledging the connection between productivity and holistic well-being. Modern HR functions within complex regulatory frameworks, especially in Nigeria, where entities such as the Ministry of Labour and Employment, NLC, NECA, and ITF influence employment governance. Effectively navigating complex legal and institutional frameworks, particularly across formal and informal sectors, necessitates HR policies that are both compliant and adaptable to changing labour dynamics. These developments indicate a strategic, human-centered approach to labour management that is nuanced at the local level while being informed by global perspectives.



Figure 3: Practices in SHRM

In Nigeria, human resource and labour dynamics demonstrate a hybrid structure that incorporates global HR trends alongside unique local socio-economic conditions. The informal sector is predominant, comprising over 75% of the employment in the country. This encompasses self-employment, casual labour, and emerging gig work arrangements, all of which generally lack formal human resource practices, including structured recruitment, performance evaluation, and compensation systems. Informalization presents considerable challenges to labour regulation, social protection, and workforce development, requiring the development of innovative policy frameworks and institutional strategies to provide protections and support for this

substantial segment of the workforce. The ongoing youth employment crisis and the related skills mismatch are critical issues, as noted by Orugun, Enimola, and Nafiu (2019). This situation arises when educational institutions generate graduates whose qualifications do not meet the demands of the labour market. This disconnect negatively impacts employability and productivity, highlighting the need for HR systems that can effectively upskill and integrate Nigeria's young population into meaningful employment opportunities. Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) constitute a critical component of Nigeria's non-oil economy; however, they encounter various challenges such as insufficient financial capital, inadequate infrastructure, and limited human resource capacity. Orugun and Aduku (2017) observed that HR management in SMEs is frequently underdeveloped. However, it plays a crucial role in enhancing job quality, stability, and competitiveness of firms. The relationship between compensation and employee performance is a significant aspect of Nigerian labour dynamics. Nafiu, Orugun, and Garba (2014) illustrated that insufficient wage systems adversely affect job satisfaction and performance, with significant consequences for family welfare and workforce stability. To tackle these challenges, contemporary HR in Nigeria must transit from mere administrative compliance to adopting performance-based remuneration, transparent appraisal systems, and incentive structures that align employee well-being with organizational outcomes. The interconnected challenges of informality, skills gaps, SME fragility, and compensation inequities highlight the necessity for a revised HR

framework in Nigeria that is contextually aware, strategically cohesive, and oriented towards development.

## **WHY THIS TOPIC MATTERS FOR NIGERIA TODAY**

Employment is more than a statistical measure of economic activity; it is a mirror of national wellbeing, social cohesion, and human potential. Today, Nigeria faces an intricate web of employment challenges: a burgeoning youth population eager for meaningful work, rising graduate unemployment, an expanding informal sector, and an evolving skills landscape driven by technological change.

In a nation endowed with abundant human capital and entrepreneurial energy, the paradox of persistent joblessness and underemployment presents both a developmental puzzle and a policy imperative. Understanding and addressing the dynamics that govern labour market outcomes is therefore not optional, it is essential for our national survival and progress.

## **CENTRAL THESIS OF THE LECTURE**

This lecture argues that: “Despite Nigeria’s abundant human capital and dynamic labour market, structural, institutional and educational mismatches continue to generate complexity in employment dynamics. Drawing on empirical evidence from my research, I seek to decompress and clarify these complexities, and thus provide pathways for improved policy, institutional practice and industry engagement.” This lecture is grounded in over two decades of research in the fields of human resource management, entrepreneurship, wage administration, and labour-market alignment, work that has spanned diverse

contexts including youth employment programs, SME development, and compensation policy in both public and private sectors.

## **SITUATING THE CONTEXT: NIGERIA'S EMPLOYMENT LANDSCAPE**

The Vice Chancellor, Ma, in order to meaningfully engage with the complexities of Nigerian employment dynamics, it is vital to situate our discussion within the broader socio-economic and institutional context that shapes labour market outcomes. Nigeria's employment landscape today is a product of historical legacies, current policy choices, demographic shifts, and the global economic environment. It is marked by striking contrasts: a youthful, growing labour force on one hand, and limited opportunities for decent and sustainable employment on the other. These contradictions form the bedrock of what I describe as the "compressed complexities" of Nigeria's employment ecosystem.

### **STATISTICS AND TRENDS:**

#### **YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT, INFORMAL SECTOR PREVALENCE, AND LABOUR MARKET STRUCTURE**

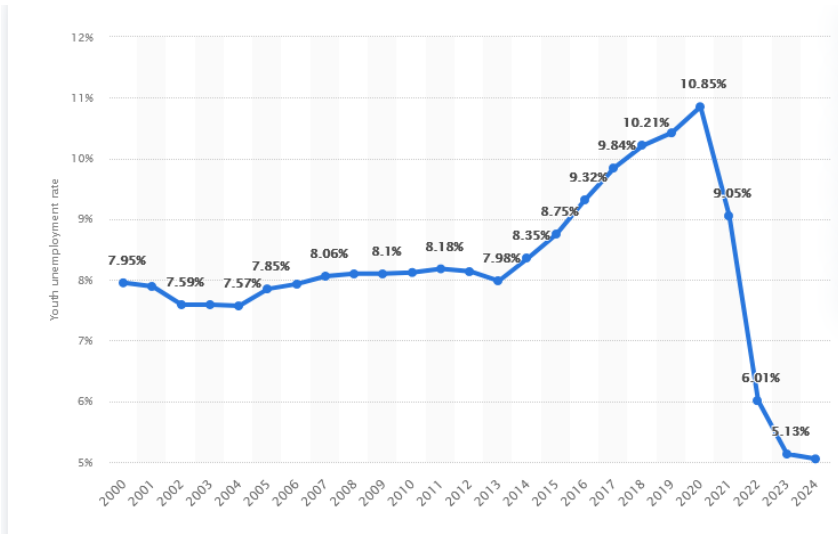
According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2023), Nigeria's unemployment rate hovered around 4.2%, a sharp revision from previous years following a change in methodology. However, a more telling figure is that underemployment affects over 43% of the working-age population, particularly among youth aged 15–35. This group accounts for nearly 60% of Nigeria's unemployed population (NBS, 2023). The World Bank estimates that about 500,000 young people enter the labour force

each year, yet the economy does not create enough jobs to absorb them. This has resulted in what economists term ‘labour market slack’, wherein a significant portion of the workforce is willing and able to work but cannot find meaningful or appropriately matched opportunities (NBS, 2023).

Equally important is the dominance of the informal sector, which accounts for over 80% of total employment in Nigeria. While the informal sector plays a crucial role in sustaining livelihoods, it is often associated with low wages, job insecurity, limited access to social protection, and weak regulatory oversight. In practical terms, this means millions of Nigerians are working without contracts, benefits, or clear career pathways, exposing them to economic shocks and reinforcing cycles of poverty and vulnerability.

Moreover, Nigeria’s labour market structure remains largely segmented. Public sector employment continues to be perceived as the most desirable due to job security and pension benefits, yet it is unable to absorb more than 10% of the labour force (NBS, 2023). Private sector opportunities, especially in formal industries such as finance, telecommunications, and oil and gas, are limited in scope and geographically concentrated in urban areas, particularly Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt. This leaves rural and peri-urban regions heavily dependent on agriculture, petty trading, and artisanal occupations, many of which are seasonal and informal (Statista, 2024).

## Estimated Youth Unemployment Rate in Nigeria



Source: Statista (2024)

In 2024, the estimated youth unemployment rate in Nigeria was at almost 5.05 percent. According to the source, the data are estimates from the International Labour Organization, an agency of the United Nations developing policies to set labour standards. The youth unemployment rate refers to the percentage of the unemployed in the age group of 15 to 24 years as compared to the total labour force. Youth unemployment rates are often higher than overall unemployment rates, which is true in Nigeria as well: the general rate of unemployment was approximately six percent in 2018. One reason for this contrast is that many of the youth under age 24 are studying full-time and are unavailable for work due to this.

**Table 1: Informal Sector Employment in Nigeria**

Informal Sector Employment in Nigeria (2010 - 2025)		
Year	Informal Employment (% of Total Employment)	Key Context and Data Source
2017	92.4% (Official)	<b>NBS Labour Force Report (Q3 2017).</b> This is a crucial data point, showing the massive surge into informality post-recession.
2022	92.7% (Official)	<b>NBS Labour Force Report (Q4 2022).</b> Confirmed a return to and even exceeding pre-pandemic informality levels.
2023	91.5% (Official)	<b>NBS Labour Force Report (Q2 2023).</b> Slight fluctuation, but the share remains overwhelmingly dominant.

Note:

It is crucial to understand that the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) does not publish a single, annual "informal employment rate." The most reliable figures come from their periodic **Labour Force Surveys** and **Labour Force Reports**. The years with official data in the table (2017, 2022, 2023) correspond to the quarters in which these comprehensive surveys were conducted and reported.

**Nigeria: Unemployment, Underemployment, and Labour Force Figures (2022-2025)**

Year / Period	Unemployment Rate	Underemployment Rate	Labour Force Participation Rate	Key Context & Data Source
2022 (Q4)	4.10%	12.40%	57.50%	<b>Source: NBS Labour Force Survey (LFS) Q4 2022.</b>
				• <b>Context:</b> This was the first report using the new methodology. The low unemployment rate reflects that most Nigerians <i>must</i> work to survive, even in small-scale, low-productivity informal jobs
2023 (Q2)	4.20%	12.60%	59.50%	<b>Source: NBS Labour Force Survey (LFS) Q2 2023.</b>
				• <b>Context:</b> Near-identical to the 2022 figures, confirming a stable but precarious labour market. The Combined Rate of Unemployment and Time-Related Underemployment was <b>16.9%</b> , meaning nearly 1 in 6 willing workers lacked adequate work.

**Source: National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2024)**

## **RECENT SHIFTS: TECHNOLOGY, GLOBALISATION, AND CHANGING SKILLS DEMAND**

The Vice Chancellor, Ma, in recent years, the structure and expectations of the labour market have shifted significantly, driven by forces both internal and external. One of the most transformative influences is the advancement of digital technology. The growth of Nigeria's tech ecosystem particularly in cities like Lagos, Ibadan, and Abuja has spurred new forms of employment such as gig work, e-commerce, digital content creation, and software engineering. Nigeria now boasts of one of the fastest-growing tech startup sectors in Africa, with tech hubs such as Andela, Flutterwave, and Paystack offering a glimpse into the future of employment.

However, these gains are unevenly distributed. Access to digital literacy and broadband infrastructure remains limited in rural areas. Furthermore, the digital economy demands new skillsets including coding, data analytics, UI/UX design, and digital marketing which are often absent from traditional university curricula. As a result, the potential of digital jobs to significantly reduce unemployment is constrained by a persistent skills mismatch between labour supply and demand (Enimola, Orugun, & Salihu, 2020).

Alongside technological shifts, globalisation and outsourcing trends have introduced additional layers of complexity. On one hand, they have enabled some Nigerian professionals to work remotely for foreign firms, expanding income opportunities. On the other, they have exposed local industries to heightened competition, especially in manufacturing and services.

Moreover, global economic shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic and supply chain disruptions have destabilized sectors like aviation, tourism, and hospitality, where employment losses have yet to fully recover.

As global and regional trade evolves, Nigerian employers increasingly require workers who can adapt to cross-border business norms, multicultural teams, and technological interfaces. This has changed the profile of a “desirable employee” from merely possessing qualifications to demonstrating transferable, dynamic, and globalized skills (Otajele, Orugun, & Ameh, 2024).

## **Japa and the Complexities of Nigerian Employment**

The growing wave of "Japa-Nigerians" leaving the country for other countries where opportunities are better-is closely linked to the structural issues evident in Nigeria's labour market. Okunade and Awosusi (2023) identified the drivers for this type of migration to include a lack of confidence in Nigerian institutions, underemployment, and economic instability/insecurity. Their work on Nigerian students studying in the UK indicates that many of these students use student visas to "flee" unfavorable working conditions in Nigeria. It is also driven by improved stability in educational institutions, better protection of labour rights, and better career prospects abroad. Meanwhile, Olumoyo and Abiri (2023) identified the contributing factors to the “Japa syndrome” as poor governance, continued unemployment, insecurity due to terrorism and kidnapping, and strikes in higher education. These authors

argued that such exodus is already threatening to delay long-term development through brain drain in critical areas, including technology, education, and health.

The effects of this migration reflect more serious issues in Nigeria's labour market. According to empirical research by Ikyator, Abachi, and Onyeje Doki (2024), macroeconomic stressors such as inflation, youth unemployment, and ineffective government are statistically significant predictors of Japa. Nigeria's human capital is being depleted by this continuous talent exodus at a time when the country needs highly skilled workers to strengthen its institutions and promote economic growth. People are compelled to leave because of unfavourable working conditions, and their departure further reduces domestic capacity, creating a vicious cycle. To restore opportunity and trust at home, systemic labour market reforms, institutional strengthening, investment in high-quality jobs, and improved governance are all necessary. Addressing Japa requires more than just immigration policy.

### **Virtual Japa: The New Face of Migration**

A recent trend aptly described as "Virtual Japa" because it does not involve physical relocation but achieves the same financial goal of fleeing the constraints of the Nigerian labour market. Digital migration of this sort occurs when Nigerians relocate virtually-while maintaining residence within Nigeria's borders-to remote work with foreign firms, often in technology, finance, digital marketing, design, and customer service. New forms of migration facilitated by the digital globalization process have increasingly blurred the boundaries that defined orthodox

migration practices by uncoupling skills from the physical movements of people, as scholars such as Ponzanesi (2019) and Zhao (2021) document different forms of contemporary labour mobility. Young Nigerians are increasingly able to bypass local job shortages, obtain salaries in better currencies like the dollar or pound, and immunize themselves against weak wage structures and inflation due to this trend. Without incurring the cost and limits imposed by visas, relocation, and foreign regulatory systems, Virtual Japa captures many of the ambitions of traditional Japa: stability, higher pay, and professional satisfaction. Virtual Japa thus became an attractive pivot route for young people who suffered from underemployment, unemployment, and poor institutional performance in their home country.

Yet, this growth of Virtual Japa presents a fresh set of challenges to Nigeria's labour market and, by extension, general development. Researchers and academics (Bobie *et al.*, 2025; Rukema & Nkoko, 2024) have recently begun cautioning that while physical migration leads to brain drain, digital migration can lead to "borderless brain drain," in which local industries lose their talent to multinational employers without even benefitting from knowledge transfer or diaspora remittances. Again, because many remote workers do not fit into traditional categories of employment, the practice also makes labour regulations and tax administration more difficult, raising concerns about lost revenue and a lack of protection for workers. More recently, Virtual Japa worsens a local talent shortage brought on by physical Japa within the fast-growing ranks of the

fintech industry, healthcare IT, and software engineering. Both physical and virtual exodus carry the risk of shrinking domestic capacity, ballooning wages within the field of scarcity, and making local businesses, free-for-all, and competing with multinational employers for a common pool of employees.

## **UNPACKING THE COMPLEXITIES OF NIGERIA'S EMPLOYMENT ECOSYSTEM**

The term “employment dynamics” refers not merely to job availability but to a network of interrelated systems: education, policy, industry, social structures, and macroeconomic trends. In Nigeria, the word “complexities” is not rhetorical, it is empirical.

### **Formal vs Informal Employment**

The Vice Chancellor, Ma, as noted earlier, the informal sector dominates employment. Yet this dominance is not just a matter of numbers, it reveals a structural duality in how Nigerians engage with work. Formal employment often requires institutional certification, tax compliance, and regulatory oversight. Informal employment, by contrast, operates in a parallel economy where workers may never interact with labour laws, health insurance, pensions, or occupational safety standards.

This duality complicates efforts to design inclusive employment policies. For instance, while government incentives such as tax holidays or training grants can stimulate formal employment, they may be irrelevant for informal micro-entrepreneurs who lack formal registration. Moreover, transitions from informal to

formal work are rare, underscoring the rigidity in mobility pathways across these sectors.

### **Education–Employment Mismatch**

One of the most persistent challenges in Nigerian employment is the misalignment between educational outputs and labour market needs. A report by the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) revealed that over 47% of employers consider Nigerian graduates "unemployable" due to deficiencies in practical skills, critical thinking, and workplace readiness.

This challenge is further exacerbated by the lack of industry–academia collaboration. University curricula, often outdated and theoretical, fail to prepare students for real-world problems. Technical and vocational education (TVET) is underfunded and suffers from low prestige, despite its relevance to growing sectors such as construction, logistics, and renewable energy.

### **Labour Regulation and Enforcement**

Labour laws in Nigeria, such as the Labour Act of 2004, are rarely enforced, especially in informal and small enterprise contexts. Issues such as contractual ambiguity, unpaid wages, lack of grievance mechanisms, and gender discrimination persist unchecked. The absence of robust labour inspection regimes creates an environment where exploitative practices can thrive.

### **Entrepreneurship and Survivalist Enterprises**

In response to formal employment gaps, many Nigerians turn to entrepreneurship not as a strategic business choice, but as a survival strategy. While Nigeria is often cited as having one of the highest rates of entrepreneurial activity in Africa, much of

this is necessity-driven, characterized by small-scale, low-margin operations with limited growth potential.

A distinction must be made between opportunity entrepreneurship (which creates jobs and adds value) and necessity entrepreneurship (which often sustains individuals but lacks scalability). This distinction is crucial in designing policy interventions. Blanket assumptions that entrepreneurship is a panacea for youth unemployment fail to account for the risks, constraints, and saturation in many informal trades.

### **LINKING CONTEXT TO EMPIRICAL RESEARCH: MY WORK ON YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IN KOGI STATE**

The Vice Chancellor, Ma, my own research has sought to interrogate these dynamics through grounded, empirical inquiry. In a 2019 co-authored study titled “Entrepreneurial Skills and Youth Employment in Kogi State, Nigeria: The Case of N-Power” (Enimola, Orugun, & Nafiu, 2019), we explored the intersection of youth entrepreneurship training and employability within a government-supported intervention.

The study focused on the N-Power program, which aims to equip young Nigerians with employable skills in areas such as agriculture, education, and health. Using a mixed-method approach, survey questionnaire, focus groups, and key informant interviews, we assessed how entrepreneurial training influenced the employment trajectories of participating youth in Kogi State.

The findings revealed a disjuncture between training content and local market realities. While participants reported improved

business awareness and skills, many lacked the capital, mentorship, and enabling environment to transition from training to enterprise formation. More critically, we observed that soft skills such as negotiation, digital literacy, and customer engagement were stronger predictors of post-program employment than technical competencies alone.

This research underlined three key insights:

1. Skills acquisition is necessary but not sufficient, enabling environments, access to credit, and post-training support are equally important.
2. Employment programs must be contextualized to regional economic patterns. What works in Lagos may not translate to Kogi, Borno, or Delta.
3. Entrepreneurship must be redefined as both a mindset and a system requiring ecosystem-level thinking beyond individual training.

These insights reinforce the earlier argument: employment in Nigeria is not merely a function of job numbers or GDP growth, it is a systemic outcome shaped by policy design, institutional coordination, individual agency, and socio-economic conditions.

### **The Need for Disaggregated Approaches**

In synthesizing this context, it is vital to resist monolithic interpretations of the Nigerian labour market. Employment dynamics differ markedly across:

- I. Sectors (e.g., agriculture, ICT, education, manufacturing)
- II. Regions (e.g., Northern Nigeria's agrarian economies vs Southern Nigeria's industrial hubs)

- III. Demographics (e.g., gender, age, education level)
- IV. Firm types (e.g., SMEs, multinationals, cooperatives, startups)

For example, in the Niger Delta, environmental degradation affects agricultural employment; in Kano, the textile industry faces import competition; in Lagos, fintech firms demand high-tech skills. Policies and academic discourse must reflect these nuances. A “one-size-fits-all” approach to employment will not yield sustainable outcomes.

This complexity calls for multi-actor collaboration: universities must reimagine their training mandates; industries must invest in upskilling; governments must provide enabling infrastructure; and workers themselves must cultivate lifelong learning habits.

## **MY RESEARCH FOCUS**

### **Wages, Compensation and Employee Performance**

The Vice Chancellor, Ma, in many labour-market discussions, focus tends to emphasize the availability of jobs, the number of entrants, unemployment rates and skills issues. Yet perhaps just as critical, though less frequently interrogated in public discourse is the question of how employees are compensated, how compensation systems are administered, and how that in turn affects job performance, retention, labour-mobilization and ultimately the quality of employment. In the Nigerian context, compensation and its administration take on heightened importance given the size of the informal sector, the prevalence of precarious employment, and the extent to which families depend on employment-income for survival. My study “An

Examination of the Correlative Impact of Wages and Salaries Administration on Employee Job Performance and Survival of Families in Nigeria: An Opinion Survey” (Nafiu, Orugun & Garba, 2014) provides empirical grounding for this conversation.

The overarching argument we develop here is that compensation is not simply a cost item or administrative after-thought in organizations; it is a strategic human-resource lever that influences whether employees perform, stay, move between sectors (formal vs informal), and whether employment yields the intended social and economic outcomes. In Nigeria’s evolving labour market, the implications are profound: compensation influences job-quality, sectoral mobility, formalization, and by extension, employment dynamics at a macro scale. In Nafiu, Orugun and Garba (2014), we conducted a survey of Nigerian workers and organizations to examine the correlation between wages and salaries administration (i.e., how effectively wage policy is implemented) and employee job performance, as well as the wider effect on family survival. Their methodology included questionnaire distributed across selected organizations in Nigeria, using Taro Yamani sampling approach and proportional allocation methods. Data were analyzed using Likert-scale responses and descriptive statistics. A substantial portion of respondents strongly agreed that poor wages and salaries administration negatively impacts job performance, for example, 48 % strongly agreed and 26 % agreed that poor wage administration can affect job performance negatively. Respondents also agreed that changes in wages and salaries

structure have an impact on the living standards of families in Nigeria. For instance, 39 % strongly agreed and 18.7 % agreed with the statement that change in wage/salary structure affects family living standards. We concluded that wages and salaries are the “life-blood” of the Nigerian economy, and that administering them effectively is key for both organizational performance and family survival. From this work, it is clear that in the Nigerian organizational context, the administration of compensation, not just the nominal level of wages is strongly correlated with job performance and broader socio-economic welfare (i.e., survival of families).

### **Implications for Employment Dynamics**

The link between compensation and job performance is relatively intuitive: when employees feel fairly and timely compensated, they are more motivated, more likely to be engaged in their roles, and more likely to exert discretionary effort. Conversely, when compensation is delayed, irregular or seen as unfair, job performance tends to decline, absenteeism increases, and turnover risk rises. In the Nigerian context, where many workers are living close to subsistence levels and where alternative livelihood options (especially in the informal sector) may be readily accessible, compensation becomes a strong lever: if formal employment fails to deliver adequate compensation, employees may prefer informal work which offers less stability but perhaps more immediate cash-flow or flexibility. This migration away from formal employment reduces the capacity of the formal sector to absorb labour and weakens the formal employment ecosystem. My research study underscores the

dynamic, that poor wage administration correlates with poorer performance suggests that organizational outcomes (productivity, service quality, retention) are at risk when compensation systems are weak.

Motivation is more than job satisfaction. It includes the decision by a worker whether to accept a job, stay in a job, move to another job, or exit the formal labour market altogether. If compensation is perceived as inadequate especially relative to cost of living, inflation, or opportunity costs in alternative employment, then workers may choose lower-quality jobs (e.g., informal sector) or even self-employment not by choice but necessity. In Nigeria, where the informal sector is dominant, this means that compensation issues in the formal sector have broader labour-market consequences. A formal job may pay a modest wage but come with delays, poor wage-administration, and little opportunity for progression, this may drive a worker to informal entrepreneurship or trading which may offer more control and immediate income though less stability. Therefore, compensation systems that are poorly administered or low in value can become a push factor from formal employment into informal employment, exacerbating informalization of the labour force and weakening formal job growth.

Compensation intersects with the question of formalization. Formal jobs generally offer regulated wages, potential benefits (pension, health, union representation), and career progression. When compensation in formal jobs, however, fails to deliver expected value or is administered poorly, the attractiveness of formal employment declines. Workers may prefer informal

sector opportunities which may provide higher immediate cash returns (though lower long-term security). This undermines efforts to formalize employment or expand formal job creation, thereby sustaining high informal-sector shares in employment (which in Nigeria is estimated over 80 %). My study indirectly supports this link: wage administration is a dimension of employment quality and job choice. My research emphasizes that wages and salaries administration has implications not just for organizational outcomes but for family survival, highlighting the social dimension of compensation. In developing-country contexts like Nigeria, where average earnings are low, and many employees support large families or extended households, the adequacy, timeliness and fairness of compensation determine standard of living, ability to invest in health and education, and capacity to withstand shocks. Employment dynamics therefore cannot be reduced to “job counts” alone; we must consider the quality of the job as determined, in part, by wage and salary administration. Poor compensation undermines employment’s capacity to serve as a development lever. When many formally employed workers still struggle to meet basic needs because of inadequate compensation or poor administration, the promise of employment as a pathway out of poverty falters (Benjamin, Orugun, & Simon, 2023).

## **STRUCTURAL DRIVERS OF EMPLOYMENT COMPLEXITIES**

The employment question in Nigeria is multidimensional. It is not simply the result of insufficient job openings, but of

structural misalignments that constrain productive engagement of labour. These drivers are interdependent which are demographic expansion without matching productivity, weak linkages between education and work, pervasive informality, macroeconomic instability, and governance inefficiencies. To decompress the complexities of employment, it is necessary to unpack these structural forces and how they interact to reproduce underemployment and labour market fragility.

### **i. Demographic Pressure and the Youth Bulge**

Nigeria's population is expanding faster than its economy can create sustainable jobs. The National Population Commission (NPC, 2024) estimates Nigeria's population at over 223 million, with nearly 60 percent under the age of 30. Every year, more than three million new entrants join the labour market (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2024). Yet, the economy's absorptive capacity remains limited.

The youth bulge presents both a demographic dividend and a demographic time bomb. When well harnessed through education, health, and employment, it can drive innovation and growth; when neglected, it fuels unemployment, migration, and insecurity (World Bank, 2023). Nigeria's challenge lies in the mismatch between its youthful labour supply and the demand for skilled labour in productive sectors.

High fertility rates and rapid urbanisation further compound this problem. The United Nations (2023) projects that Nigeria will become the third most populous country by 2050, after India and China. Without deliberate job creation strategies, this surge will exacerbate underemployment and social vulnerability.

### **iii. Informality and the Precarious Nature of Work**

The most defining feature of Nigeria's labour market is its extreme informality. Over 92 percent of employed persons work in informal enterprises like micro and small businesses without formal contracts, social protection, or productivity-enhancing technologies (NBS, 2024).

While the informal sector provides a safety valve against mass unemployment, it also perpetuates low productivity, income volatility, and vulnerability. Informal workers often lack access to health insurance, pensions, and credit, making them highly susceptible to economic shocks (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2023). Informality also distorts labour data, complicating policy targeting and revenue mobilisation.

Scholars such as Ezeani (2023) argue that the persistence of informality reflects deeper structural issues, weak institutions, burdensome regulation, and inadequate infrastructure that make formalisation unattractive. In effect, informality in Nigeria is not a temporary phase but a permanent state of the economy.

### **iv. Macroeconomic Instability and Policy Volatility**

Employment creation thrives in an environment of macroeconomic stability, but Nigeria's economy has been marked by repeated shocks and inconsistent policy directions. Volatile oil prices, exchange-rate fluctuations, and inflationary pressures have undermined business confidence and investment. Following the removal of fuel subsidies and exchange-rate unification in 2023, inflation surged to above 33 percent by mid-2024, eroding purchasing power and discouraging firms from expanding their workforce (Central Bank of Nigeria [CBN],

2024). The high cost of energy, transport, and imported inputs further constrains productivity and competitiveness, especially for small enterprises.

Policy reversals and inconsistent implementation have also dampened investor confidence. Frequent changes in taxation, import tariffs, and regulatory frameworks create uncertainty, discouraging long-term job-creating investments. As Onyekwena and Olomola (2023) observed, that Nigeria's macroeconomic fragility converts potential economic growth into jobless or precarious growth where GDP expands without commensurate employment.

#### **v. Governance and Institutional Weaknesses**

Governance is the invisible hand shaping labour outcomes. Nigeria's employment policies often suffer from weak coordination, duplication, and limited accountability. Over the past two decades, numerous programmes from NAPEP to N-Power have sought to tackle youth unemployment, yet many have been short-lived or inadequately evaluated (Akinola, 2024). Corruption and elite capture further undermine effectiveness. Employment and empowerment schemes sometimes become politicised instruments rather than strategic economic tools. Institutional fragmentation with overlapping mandates across ministries, departments, and agencies hampers coherence in employment planning (African Development Bank [AfDB], 2024).

Additionally, weak labour market information systems mean that data on job creation, skills demand, and wages are often outdated or inconsistent. The absence of robust data impedes

evidence-based policymaking, leaving interventions reactive rather than preventive

## **vi. Infrastructure and Energy Constraints**

Infrastructure remains a major bottleneck to productive employment. Unreliable power supply, poor transportation networks, and weak digital connectivity raise the cost of doing business and discourage industrial expansion. The World Bank (2024) estimated that Nigerian firms lose over 25 percent of sales annually due to power outages. For micro and small enterprises, this translates directly into reduced output and employment potential.

Energy poverty also limits the development of rural industries that could absorb labour and stem migration to cities. Without stable electricity, mechanised agriculture, manufacturing, and digital services, all key employment drivers remain underdeveloped.

## **vii. Regional and Gender Disparities**

Nigeria's employment challenges are not uniformly distributed. The northern regions experience higher rates of unemployment and underemployment, exacerbated by insecurity, low industrialisation, and weak educational attainment. The NBS (2024) noted that the North-East and North-West zones account for the highest shares of working poor, while southern states, particularly Lagos and Ogun, concentrate most formal sector jobs.

Gender disparities also persist. Women constitute a significant share of the labour force but remain concentrated in informal,

low-wage activities. Cultural norms, unequal access to land and finance, and care responsibilities limit women's full economic participation (UN Women, 2023). Closing gender employment gaps could raise Nigeria's GDP by up to 20 percent, according to the McKinsey Global Institute (2023).

### **Viii. Security Challenges and Conflict-Induced Displacement**

Insecurity, particularly in the North-East, North-West, and parts of the Middle Belt, has become an employment disrupter. The Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, and farmer–herder conflicts have displaced millions, destroyed farmlands, and disrupted local economies (International Crisis Group, 2024).

Conflict-driven displacement not only reduces agricultural output but also floods urban centres with job seekers, intensifying competition for limited opportunities. The loss of livelihoods contributes to a vicious cycle of poverty and insecurity, where unemployment both results from and fuels conflict.

### **ix. Technological Disruption and the Changing Nature of Work**

Digitalisation and automation are transforming labour markets globally, and Nigeria is not exempt. While technology creates new jobs in ICT, logistics, and e-commerce, it also displaces traditional roles. The gig economy exemplified by platforms such as Bolt, Uber, Jumia, and Upwork offers flexibility but minimal social protection. The Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG, 2024) warns that without regulation and

upskilling, digital labour risks entrenching informality rather than resolving it.

Thus, the structural drivers of employment complexity converge in a paradox: Nigeria's economy grows, yet the quality and inclusivity of jobs decline. Employment generation, therefore, must confront not only the number of jobs but the nature and sustainability of work.

## **CONTEXTUALIZING NIGERIAN EMPLOYMENT LANDSCAPE**

In Nigeria, the informal sector dominates employment—various estimates put it at over 80 % of total employment. Formal sector jobs are fewer, often concentrated in urban centers, and many workers in formal sectors still experience poor job quality (e.g., low wages, irregular payment, contract insecurity). Compensation issues in formal employment therefore have ripple effects: if formal jobs fail to deliver, they cease to be attractive, and labour flows into informal employment, which in turn reduces tax base, weakens labour protections, and limits growth of high-quality jobs. Compensation systems that fail to align with expectations or economic realities (inflation, cost of living, required skills) risk contributing to this dynamic. My work shows that effective wage administration is critical. It is not enough to have a formal contract; how compensation is administered matters significantly.

With Nigeria's large youth cohort, many young people enter the labour market each year (roughly half a million annually). But many jobs they find especially early-career jobs are informal or

have compensation structures that are inadequate for sustainable livelihoods. In such scenarios, inadequate compensation and poor wage administration can push youth into under-employment, low-wage casual jobs, or entrepreneurship out of necessity rather than choice. If compensation is low and irregular, youth may lack the incentive to invest in human capital or remain in formal jobs, reducing the effectiveness of youth employment programs and training initiatives. My finding that wage administration correlates with performance and family welfare suggests that policy efforts to improve youth employment must consider compensation as a central pillar not merely job creation or training.

Compensation issues vary by region, sector and firm size. For example, large multinational firms in Lagos might have more structured compensation systems; by contrast, SMEs in rural or peri-urban Nigeria may have informal or ad-hoc payment arrangements, irregular wages, and poor administrative processes. These disparities affect job quality, retention and performance differently. In organizations where compensation is late or unpredictable, performance suffers and workers may exit. My research, while not specifying region/firm-size breakdowns in the publicly summarized abstract, nonetheless implies that wage administration is a strategic HR issue across organizations. Policies and institutional frameworks must recognize heterogeneity: what works for large formal firms may not suit informal micro-enterprises.

## **LINKING TO EMPLOYMENT DYNAMICS: DECOMPRESSING THE COMPLEXITIES**

The quality of employment is a central dimension of employment dynamics. It's not sufficient that jobs exist; they must provide income that sustains workers and families. In Nigeria's labour market, where a large share of employment is informal or under-paid, compensation systems that fail to deliver undermine the capacity of employment to contribute to development. My work reinforces this by showing the correlation between wage administration and family survival.

Employment dynamics are shaped by flows between formal and informal sectors. If formal employment cannot offer compensation reliability and fairness, workers may drift into the informal sector even if formal jobs exist. This inhibits formal job growth, tax base expansion and reduces regulatory oversight of employment. The study indicates that wage administration plays a role in whether formal employment is genuinely attractive.

Many youth employment programs or enterprise training initiatives assume that acquiring skills is enough for employment outcomes. But if the compensation structure of the jobs or enterprises that follow training is weak, sustainable employment may not result. The compensation study connects to my other work on youth employment and entrepreneurship: compensation must be built into the employment ecosystem, not treated as an afterthought.

The complexity of employment dynamics arises in part from mismatches between skills and jobs, between firm capacity and workforce, and between wage/compensation systems and

economic realities. Compensation systems that are not responsive to inflation, cost of living, labour market competition and firm capacities contribute to these mismatches. The study's recommendation that wage/salary policies reflect the dynamic nature of the economy is directly relevant here.

Finally, employment dynamics matter not only for individual workers but for families, communities and national wellbeing. The fact that wage administration correlates with family survival underscores the social dimension of employment: poor compensation undermines livelihoods, increases vulnerability, and may push workers into informal or precarious work, thus perpetuating under-employment and poverty cycles.

## **Entrepreneurship, Skills Mismatch & Youth Employment**

Vice Chancellor Ma, entrepreneurship and youth employment are frequently positioned as key solutions to the employment challenge in Nigeria. The logic is compelling: empower young people with enterprise skills, help them create businesses, absorb labour, and reduce unemployment. However, the reality is more complex and this complexity is at the heart of the “skills mismatch” and youth employment debate. Through my study titled *Entrepreneurial Skills and Youth Employment in Kogi State, Nigeria: The Case of N-Power* (Enimola, Orugun & Nafiu, 2019), we provide empirical insight that helps us interrogate this theme in depth.

The study confirms that skills matter but importantly, it nuances *which kinds* of skills matter (e.g., technology adoption, decision-

making, risk-taking) and suggests that some commonly assumed skills (financial literacy, creative thinking) were less significant in this context. This has demanding implications: training alone is insufficient, the content of training must align with market opportunities and the post-training ecosystem. In Nigeria, youth (often defined as ages 15–35) constitute a large and growing share of the working-age population. Yet unemployment and under-employment remain persistent. Many governments and development actors promote entrepreneurship as a remedy: training youth to start businesses, thereby creating jobs either for themselves or others. However, several interrelated issues emerge including skills mismatch, enterprise ecosystem weak and quality of employment. My work, Orugun *et al.* (2019) directly engage this context by focusing on beneficiaries of N-Power, a large-scale government youth employment/entrepreneurship initiative, and examining how entrepreneurial skills translate (or fail to translate) into employment outcomes.

## **Implications for Employment Dynamics**

Much employment policy focuses on “creating jobs” (in government, private sector or through SMEs). However, if youth are placed into jobs or encouraged into entrepreneurship without the requisite skills alignment, then the impact is muted. In the work of Orugun *et al.* (2019), the findings showed that the specific skills youth acquire matter significantly to their ability to obtain sustainable employment or self-employment. Thus, employment policy must integrate a robust skills alignment

component: not only “jobs available” but “jobs for which youth are prepared” and “skills for which the market demands”. We suggest that youth entrepreneurship should not simply be a fallback option but a structured pathway: one where training, skill development, access to technology, decision-making frameworks, market linkages, and risk-management support are provided in a coordinated manner. Entrepreneurship becomes a labour-market mechanism rather than a stop-gap.

When youth lack proper skills or operate without linkages to markets, their businesses may be low-growth, informal, precarious. This contributes to under-employment and perpetuates informal sector dominance. By focusing on skills like technology adoption and decision-making, training programs can better equip youth for higher-quality self-employment or transition into formal employment. As we emphasize, what works in Kogi State may differ from Lagos, Rivers or Kano. Employment dynamics are regionally differentiated. Training and entrepreneurship programs must therefore be tailored to regional economies, sectors, infrastructure capacities, and youth profiles. This regional tailoring helps ensure relevance, avoids mismatch, and improves impact.

## **LINKING ENTREPRENEURSHIP, SKILLS MISMATCH AND YOUTH EMPLOYMENT TO THE LARGER EMPLOYMENT DYNAMICS FRAMEWORK**

As we work to “decompress the complexities” of contemporary Nigerian employment dynamics, training youth and encouraging entrepreneurship are only part of the employment equation. Once youth are engaged in employment or enterprise, the nature of compensation, reward systems, wage administration and performance feedback loops influence whether their employment or venture is sustainable. A youth who starts a business but cannot pay wages or is poorly compensated will face retention and growth challenges.

Entrepreneurship often straddles the formal/informal divide. Youth may launch ventures informally due to regulatory burdens, capital constraints or market limitations. Skills training programs that emphasize formal business practices (tech adoption, decision-making) can help convert informal ventures into formal, scalable ones thereby shifting employment dynamics toward more formalized, higher-quality jobs.

The “skills mismatch” is not simply a matter of training deficit, it resides in the structural interplay of education systems, labour-market demand, regional economies, infrastructure, technology access and regulatory frameworks. The Orugun *et al.* (2019) study demonstrated that even when training is provided, without contextual alignment and ecosystem support, youth employment outcomes may remain weak. Thus, the employment dynamics complexity arises from multiple mismatches (skills ↔ demand, training ↔ job opportunity, youth ↔ infrastructure).

Youth entrepreneurship and employment are not one-off events; they form paths of mobility. When youths acquire relevant entrepreneurial skills, they may move from unemployment to self-employment to perhaps hiring others, or transit into formal employment with entrepreneurship mindset. These mobility pathways matter for the overall health of the labour market. The study showed that skills like decision-making and risk-taking enhance such mobility potential.

The employment dynamics in Nigeria vary widely by region, sector, infrastructure and demographics. The study's focus on Kogi State rather than national aggregate data, this highlights that one must consider sub-national contexts when designing youth employment or entrepreneurship programs. Thus, the complexity of Nigerian employment dynamics is partly spatial. Entrepreneurship, Skills Mismatch & Youth Employment lies at the heart of our agenda to decompress the complexities of Nigerian employment dynamics. Through this study, we see that youth employment programs must be more than generic; they must integrate relevant entrepreneurial skills, align with market opportunities, and embed into ecosystems of support. The skills mismatch is not simply a matter of "training more" but "training right, in context, and supporting translation into employment or enterprise".

In a country such as Nigeria, where youth numbers are large, formal employment opportunities are limited, and the informal sector remains dominant, these nuances matter. When youths are equipped with the right entrepreneurial skills and supported effectively, they can become job-creators rather than just

job-seekers. However, to realize this potential, stakeholders must coordinate: policy makers must design programs that connect with real labour market and enterprise ecology; industry must engage in skills planning and youth pathways; academia must align curricula and training with those pathways; and youth themselves must adapt to evolving demands, cultivate critical skills, adopt technology, manage risk and seize opportunities. By anchoring our understanding of employment dynamics in such empirically grounded themes, we can move beyond superficial prescriptions (“just train youth”, “just start businesses”) to more strategic, integrated and evidence-based responses. Entrepreneurship therefore is not a panacea in isolation but when properly aligned with skills, context, markets and support systems, it becomes a powerful lever for youth employment, formalization, and sustainable job creation in Nigeria.

## **Human Capital, Intellectual Capital and SMEs Performance**

Madam Vice Chancellor, in the discourse on employment dynamics, it is common to emphasize the supply side; workers, job-seekers, youth entering the labour force, skills mismatch, etc. However, the demand side, specifically the capacity of firms to absorb labour, upgrade jobs, foster innovation, and grow sustainably, is equally critical. In particular, the role of human and intellectual capital within firms especially small and medium enterprises (SMEs) which often bear the bulk of job creation in Nigeria is of strategic importance. In 2017, Orugun and Aduku (2017) analyzed empirical studies on intellectual

capital (IC) and organizational performance, particularly in competitive business environments. We define intellectual capital as comprising three main dimensions: human capital (skills, competencies, knowledge of employees), structural capital (processes, databases, organizational structure, systems) and relational capital (relationships with customers, suppliers, networks).

### **Implications for Employment Dynamics**

One of the central implications is that employment dynamics are deeply influenced by the capacity of firms to create and sustain jobs of quality. When a firm invests in human capital (skilled employees, continuous training), and intellectual capital (processes, systems, networks), it is better positioned to compete, expand, and thus employ more people. Conversely, firms that operate on minimal human capital investment, limited innovation and weak systems are less likely to provide stable, good-quality jobs; they may remain low-productivity, low-wage, informal or precarious. In Nigeria, many SMEs operate with constrained resources, limited formal HR systems, and minimal investment in intangible assets. The review by Orugun and Aduku (2017) suggested that enhancing intellectual capital within these firms could raise their productivity, competitiveness and thus their ability to carry a larger workforce, pay better and provide upward mobility.

Employment creation is not just about increasing headcount but about improving capabilities, employees are not just “bodies at desks” but knowledge workers with capacity to learn, innovate, use systems, add value. Human capital development within

firms enables innovation, which in turn can lead to business growth and greater employment opportunities (including higher-skilled positions). The review underscores that intellectual capital fosters innovation. In employment dynamics, this means that policies directed at job creation must also consider how firms will upgrade the skills of workers, adopt systems, connect with markets, and innovate. Otherwise newly created jobs may remain low-quality, low-value and unsustainable.

Another implication is that firms with stronger human/intellectual capital are more likely to be formalized, adhere to standards, offer formal contracts and stable employment. In Nigeria, where informality is high (with many enterprises operating outside regulatory/structural frameworks), strengthening intellectual capital may help firms transit to more formal status, thus raising job quality, making employment more stable, and improving labour-market dynamics. Orugun and Aduku's review argues that intellectual capital plays a pivotal role in organizational performance which includes sustainability and competitive advantage. When firms achieve competitive advantage through human/intellectual capital, they may expand, formalize and hire more, thus influencing employment dynamics beyond simple job numbers.

Employment dynamics in Nigeria are heterogeneous: the capacity of firms varies by region, sector, size, access to capital, infrastructure and technology. SMEs in rural areas may lack structural capital (systems, databases, networks) compared to firms in urban zones. Similarly, human capital (skills, training)

may be weaker. Our findings suggest that for firms in less developed regions or smaller size, investing in intellectual capital is particularly important for performance, but also potentially more difficult due to resource constraints. Therefore, labour-market policy must recognize this heterogeneity: interventions to improve employment must support firm-level capacity building, not only demand (workers) but supply (employers) of decent employment opportunities. Enhancing human/intellectual capital in SMEs may expand job creation, raise quality and reduce precarious employment.

From policy perspective, the implication is clear: employment policy should not be solely about training workers or creating jobs; it must also be about enabling firms to absorb labour effectively, provided they have the capacity in terms of human/intellectual capital. Without this firm side capacity, labour will either be under-employed or forced into informal enterprises where job quality is weak. Hence, policy must include components such as incentives for firms to invest in employee training and knowledge systems, grants/loans for SMEs to upgrade internal systems, support for networks and relational capital (industry collaborations, knowledge sharing), and metrics that measure job quality, retention, productivity, not just headcount.

## **CONTEXTUALIZING THE NIGERIAN EMPLOYMENT LANDSCAPE**

The Vice Chancellor, Ma, in Nigeria, SMEs contribute significantly to employment but often operate in informal or quasi-informal modes, with low productivity, limited growth

and restricted capacity to scale. Many small enterprises have limited training budgets, minimal systems, weak relational networks, and often rely on low-skill labour. This curtails their ability to expand employment and provide quality jobs. According to our findings, a firm's intellectual capital (encompassing human, structural and relational capital) fundamentally influences performance. Thus, job creation efforts through SMEs should also incorporate mechanisms for boosting intellectual capital like training workers, putting in place systems, fostering relationships (suppliers, networks, customers) and enabling knowledge sharing; so, the SMEs can grow, hire more, pay better, and provide more stable employment.

In addition to SMEs, many larger firms and sectors in Nigeria still treat employees in transactional ways, limited training, limited career progression, minimal technology adoption. Without investment in human capital, firms may struggle to remain competitive, may downsize, outsource or rely on low-skill labour pools. This has implications for employment dynamics: an economy where many firms lack human capital investments will struggle to generate high-quality employment, and the labour supply side (workers) may face limited opportunities for skills upgrades and upward mobility. Orugun and Aduku's review emphasizes the strategic role of human capital within the broader intellectual capital framework. Human capital is the first dimension of IC, and firms that treat it as central tend to do better. Thus, labour-market policy should incentivize firms to invest in human capital not simply through

subsidies but through systems for continuous training, knowledge management and integration of human capital with firm strategy.

Structural capital includes organizational processes, databases, systems, policies, work flows. Relational capital includes firm's relationships with customers, suppliers, networks, brand reputation, partnerships. In Nigeria, many firms (especially SMEs) have weak structural and relational capital as they may not have formalized systems, CRM, knowledge management, linkages to research institutions or networks. Such weaknesses limit innovation, productivity and job growth. The review indicates that it is not enough to invest in human capital if structural/relational capitals are weak, it is the synergy that produces performance. In employment dynamics terms, when firms have weak structural/relational capital they may remain small, informal, low productivity, hence cannot offer many stable jobs or invest in workers' skills. Strengthening these capitals helps create employment opportunities that are sustainable and growth-oriented.

As firms grow and formalize (which often involves investing in human/intellectual capital, systems, technology), employment becomes more stable, benefits may increase, job-mobility improves, wages potentially increase, and workers may perceive formal employment as more attractive relative to informal work. Since Nigeria's labour market is characterized by a large informal sector, encouraging firm growth and formalization via intellectual capital investments may shift employment dynamics toward higher quality jobs. Orugun and Aduku's review

suggests that intellectual capital contributes to competitive advantage and organizational sustainability. Therefore, investment in IC by Nigerian firms could lead to more formal jobs, better retention, greater productivity, and thus improved employment dynamics.

### **LINKING HUMAN CAPITAL, INTELLECTUAL CAPITAL AND SMES PERFORMANCE TO THE LARGER EMPLOYMENT DYNAMICS FRAMEWORK**

Vice Chancellor Ma, employment dynamics often treat job-seekers and jobs as separate; however, jobs are created and sustained by firms that have capability (human/intellectual capital). Thus, solving employment challenges requires strengthening both supply (workers) and demand (firms). The presence of strong intellectual capital in firms enables value-added work, career progression, innovation, and thus job mobility. Employment dynamics benefit when jobs are not static, low-skill and dead-end. Firms investing in intellectual capital are more likely to formalize and grow; this shifts employment dynamics towards formal, better-protected jobs rather than informal precarious work. When firms demand higher human/intellectual capital, but the workforce is under-skilled, mismatch arises. Earlier I underscore that improving human/intellectual capital in firms helps align demand side; conversely, the worker side must match with relevant skills. Employment dynamics differ across regions/sectors; firms in one region may lack networks/training/innovation. Understanding firm capacity via intellectual capital helps tailor interventions regionally.

For Nigeria, where job creation is needed at scale, but many firms remain low-productivity, informal or under-capitalized, the lesson is that strengthening human/intellectual capital within firms can be a powerful lever for improving employment outcomes. By elevating firm capacity in training, systems, networks, we may generate more and better jobs, higher wages, improved retention, innovation and upward mobility. As we decompress the complexities of Nigerian employment dynamics, we must remember: jobs do not materialize in a vacuum they are produced by firms that have human/intellectual capital, that invest in systems and networks, that innovate and scale. Employment-creation strategies that ignore firm capacity are likely to produce weak, short-term jobs. Recognizing this dimension helps create a more holistic, integrated employment ecosystem where worker skills and job quality, firm capacity and economic structure co-evolve.

## **CORE ISSUES AND COMPLEXITIES IN NIGERIAN EMPLOYMENT DYNAMICS**

### **Mismatch between Education/Skills and Labour-Market Demand**

The Vice Chancellor, Ma, one of the most persistent and pervasive challenges in Nigeria's employment dynamics is the disconnect between what educational institutions produce and what the labour market requires. Youths may complete tertiary education or vocational training, only to find that their qualifications do not match available jobs or conversely, that emerging jobs demand skills which they lack.

Several of the themes discussed earlier point to this mismatch: from (entrepreneurial skills, decision-making, technology-adoption) to (human/intellectual capital in firms). When youth are trained in ways that emphasize certificate acquisition rather than practical competencies, they may be ill-prepared for what employers or enterprises truly demand. This leads to inefficiencies: under-utilized human capital, frustrated graduates, and firms that struggle to recruit or retain suitably skilled workers.

In Nigeria, policy reports confirm this mismatch. For example, a rapid review of youth employment needs observes that Nigerian youth identify lack of job opportunities as critical, but also inadequate skills alignment (Save-The-Children, 2022). Moreover, the informal/formal sector dynamics (discussed in the next sub-section) are exacerbated by this mismatch: when formal sector jobs require skills that youth lack, they drift into informal work.

The implication is clear: the mismatch between education/skills and labour-market demand is not simply a human capital problem, it is a structural complexity. It affects job-quality, transitions between sectors, and ultimately whether employment contributes meaningfully to development. Addressing this mismatch requires not only better aligned curricula and training programs, but also mechanisms for labour-market feedback, employer-institution linkages, and continuous upskilling.

### **Youth Employment and Job Quality**

The third complexity concerns youth employment and the quality of those jobs. Even when youth secure jobs (or

participate in programs aimed at employment or entrepreneurship), the jobs may be temporary, low-wage, under-employed (i.e., below their skills), or lacking progression. The churn, the precariousness and the mismatch of expectations vs reality all undermine the potential of employment to be a pathway to stability and growth (Orugun, & Nafiu, 2014).

Young Nigerians face multiple risks: graduating into an economy that cannot absorb them adequately, accepting informal or part-time work, or entering vocational/training programs that do not lead to sustainable jobs. Empirical reviews of Nigeria's youth employment programs show that despite large outlays, results have been modest (Enimola, Orugun, & Nafiu, 2019). For instance, one study of youth-employment policies found that despite many programs, youth unemployment persists, and core challenges include lack of funding, poor implementation capacity, weak monitoring, and political economy distortion (Orugun, *et al.*, 2019).

Job-quality matters for youth particularly: low wages, uncertain contracts, limited career pathways, and informal enterprises lead to under-employment and dissatisfaction (Sumberg *et al.*, 2020). This has broader implications: youth may opt for entrepreneurship out of necessity rather than opportunity, become disillusioned, or migrate within or outside Nigeria. From earlier discussions, we see that compensation, skills, firm capacity all intersect here. When jobs are of low-quality, the development potential of employment is weakened.

Hence, focusing on youth employment means not just "employment for youth" but good employment for youth; jobs

that align with skills, pay fairly, offer progression, and connect to formalized pathways. Without this quality dimension, employment metrics may mask deeper underlying fragilities.

### **Firm Heterogeneity and SME Constraints**

A fourth complexity arises from differences in firm size, region, sector and capability, in other words, firm heterogeneity. In Nigeria, SMEs represent a large share of employment creation but are often constrained by limited resources, weak management, inadequate human and intellectual capital, regulatory burdens, and limited access to finance and technology. From our earlier analysis, we know that human and intellectual capital within firms matters for performance. However, many Nigerian SMEs struggle to invest in training, systems, networks, technology or process upgrades. This limits their capacity to create stable, high-quality jobs. Firms with weak capacity may rely on informal arrangements, casual labour, low wages, high turnover, all indicators of poor employment quality.

Further, regional disparities mean that SMEs in more developed zones (South West, Lagos, Abuja) have better access to infrastructure, markets and human capital, whereas those in rural or less developed states may face multiple constraints. This heterogeneity means that employment dynamics cannot be assumed uniform across Nigeria.

For policy makers and industry stakeholders, this complexity implies that interventions must recognize firm capacity issues like training workers alone would not suffice if firms cannot absorb them; investment in SMEs' capabilities is needed. The employment ecosystem must support both supply (workers) and

demand (firms) sides. Otherwise, we risk creating a “pipeline” of skilled workers that firms are unable to absorb, thereby exacerbating mismatch and under-employment.

### **Compensation and Retention Challenges**

The Vice Chancellor, Ma, another inter-related complexity concerns compensation, retention and job stability. As explored earlier, compensation is a strategic HR lever; how wages are administered, how timely they are, how fair they are, all matters for job performance, retention, motivation and ultimately employment outcomes.

In the Nigerian context, many workers especially in the formal sector or in larger enterprises may face late payments, unclear wage structures, inadequate benefits, and limited progression. These factors push workers away from formal employment, or lead them to accept low-quality jobs in the informal sector. Since informal jobs often have even weaker compensation structures, this becomes a vicious cycle.

Furthermore, retention of skilled workers is challenging when compensation is not competitive or fair. Firms may lose trained workers, which reduces effectiveness of training programs and weakens job-quality. For youth especially, obtaining a job that pays poorly, or irregularly, undermines the attractiveness of formal employment and may push them toward entrepreneurship or informal arrangements.

Compensation and retention issues thus link several layers of employment dynamics: wage administration, job-quality, sector-choice, mobility, firm capacity, youth employment, and overall labour-market effectiveness.

## **Policy, Institutional and Regulatory Environment**

The final layer that stitches these various employment-related issues together is the policy, institutional, and regulatory environment. No matter how much work is done to support businesses, train young people, create jobs, or improve the quality of existing ones, these efforts will only be successful if the institutions in charge are strong, the regulations are correctly enforced, and the policies guiding them are clear. In other words, how well the system as a whole is funded, coordinated, and able to achieve results greatly influences the progress of youth empowerment, firm productivity, or skill development.

However, many reviews show that, above all, Nigerian labour-market policies, especially those which are supposed to target youth, have great difficulties on the level of implementation. It is one significant contradiction that is revealed by the 2023 review of youth employment programs: despite so many programs, youth unemployment remains high. The main causes are well-known: inadequate funding, lack of institutional capacity, inadequate coordination at the inter-ministerial or agency levels, inappropriate monitoring systems that fail to establish whether or not it is true that the programs really work, and political meddling that often breaks continuity. On this basis, not even well-conceived policies are able to give youths any real opportunity.

The gap between the formal and informal sectors is another indicator of these challenges. Though Nigeria has policies in place aimed at protecting informal workers, encouraging formalisation, and supporting SMEs, the frameworks that

underpin how these policies are to be made effective are insecure. Since the procedures are overly cumbersome or incoherent, many informal businesses continue to face insecure infrastructure, have poor information on regulations, are unable to access credit, or else simply cannot tap into the government's support systems. This constrains the ability of the nation to develop a robust, productive labour market and keeps a large section of the workforce in low-quality, unprotected jobs.

All of these issues already show that even in cases where businesses are motivated to invest in their personnel or when youngsters undergo quality training, it is weak institutions that can substantially dampen this effect. For this reason, Nigerian employment policy cannot be viewed as three separate parts: enterprise support, job creation, and skills. The employment system in its entirety needs to be tackled by a strategy that aligns business development, education, labour laws, formalization incentives, and regular monitoring. Only when these components function as a whole is the labour market able to bring about significant improvements that last.

## **TECHNOLOGY, GLOBALISATION, AND THE CHANGING NATURE OF WORK**

The 21st century has ushered in unprecedented changes in how, where, and why people work. Globalisation and technological innovation particularly digitalisation, automation, and artificial intelligence are transforming labour markets across the world. Nigeria, as Africa's most populous nation and one of its largest digital economies, stands at a crossroads: technology offers immense potential for inclusion and productivity, yet also

threatens to deepen inequality and informality if not properly managed.

### **i. Globalisation and Labour Market Integration**

Globalisation has profoundly reshaped production and employment patterns worldwide. It has intensified international trade, capital mobility, and technological diffusion, allowing firms and workers to participate in global value chains (Stiglitz, 2023). For Nigeria, integration into the global economy has brought both opportunities and vulnerabilities.

On the positive side, globalisation has expanded access to information, markets, and technology. Nigerian professionals in ICT, finance, and creative industries increasingly work remotely for global clients, earning foreign exchange and showcasing national talent (World Bank, 2024). The creative economy, particularly Nollywood, fashion, and music, has become a major employer and export earner, illustrating how global connectivity can transform local potential into global relevance (UNCTAD, 2023).

However, globalisation has also exposed Nigeria to competitive pressures that strain domestic industries. Manufacturing struggles to compete with cheaper imports from Asia, while weak infrastructure and energy costs hinder export competitiveness (Onyekwena & Olomola, 2023). Consequently, Nigeria participates in global trade primarily as a consumer rather than a producer, limiting the employment benefits of global integration. This imbalance has reinforced dependence on primary commodities and contributed to the jobless growth phenomenon.

## **ii. The Rise of the Digital Economy**

Digital transformation has emerged as one of the defining forces of contemporary employment. Nigeria’s digital economy is among the fastest-growing in Africa, contributing about 17–18 percent to GDP in 2024 (Nigerian Economic Summit Group [NESG], 2024). The proliferation of smartphones, affordable data, and fintech innovations has created new avenues for work, enterprise, and service delivery.

Platforms such as Flutterwave, Paystack, Opay, and Moniepoint have revolutionised financial inclusion, employing thousands directly and enabling millions of small businesses. The ICT sector also supports ancillary industries like digital marketing, logistics, content creation, and software development which increasingly absorb educated youth (PwC Nigeria, 2024).

However, the digital economy’s employment impact is dualistic. While it creates new high-skill jobs, it simultaneously automates or displaces low-skill roles in administration, retail, and services. Moreover, many digital jobs are gig-based and lack job security, benefits, or formal recognition. This “platformisation” of work blurs the traditional employer–employee relationship, posing regulatory challenges (ILO, 2023).

## **iii. Remote Work and Transnational Labour Markets**

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the global shift toward remote and hybrid work, creating new opportunities for Nigerian professionals to engage in international labour markets. Platforms such as Upwork, Toptal, and Fiverr have enabled skilled Nigerians to provide digital services globally, earning

foreign income and expanding employment horizons (World Bank, 2024).

This “borderless employment” represents a new frontier of opportunity , one that leverages Nigeria’s youthful population and English proficiency. Yet, it also raises questions of labour regulation, taxation, and protection. Freelancers working across jurisdictions often lack access to pension schemes, collective bargaining, or legal recourse for contract disputes.

Thus, the future of work in Nigeria is likely to be transnational and hybrid blending local and global employment patterns in ways that defy traditional policy boundaries.

#### **iv. Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Skills of the Future**

Artificial Intelligence is rapidly redefining the future of work. Tasks once performed by humans from translation and data analysis to customer service are increasingly automated. Yet, AI also creates demand for new skills in machine learning, data science, robotics, and digital ethics (OECD, 2024).

For Nigeria, the key question is preparedness. The Federal Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy (2024) launched an AI Strategy aimed at positioning Nigeria as a regional leader in AI-driven innovation. However, realising this vision requires aligning education curricula, vocational training, and industry partnerships to equip the workforce for emerging roles.

AI also raises ethical questions about surveillance, bias, and data privacy. Without robust regulatory frameworks, technological adoption could exacerbate inequality and job displacement.

## **v. Global Labour Mobility and the Brain Drain**

Technological and global connectivity have also accelerated labour migration. Thousands of Nigerian professionals like doctors, nurses, engineers, IT experts migrate annually to Europe, North America, and the Middle East in search of better employment conditions (OECD, 2024).

While remittances (over \$22 billion in 2023) contribute significantly to national income (World Bank, 2024), the loss of skilled labour undermines domestic human capital development. The “Japa” phenomenon reflects both aspiration and frustration which is a rational response to limited local opportunities and institutional inefficiencies.

Addressing brain drain requires improving domestic employment quality, remuneration, and professional fulfilment, ensuring that talent sees a future within Nigeria.

## **vi Summary: Navigating the Digital Transition**

Nigeria’s labour market stands at the threshold of a technological revolution. The challenge is not whether digitalisation will reshape employment — it already has — but how the country will adapt. The policy imperative is to ensure that innovation translates into decent work rather than exclusion. In sum, technology and globalisation are double-edged swords. They can either liberate labour from stagnation or entrench precarity. The task before Nigeria is to craft policies that equip its citizens for the future of work, while protecting the most vulnerable from being left behind.

## **INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF THESE COMPLEXITIES**

It is important to emphasize that these six core issues do not exist in isolation; they are deeply inter-woven. For example:

- I. Skills mismatch affects youth job quality and the informal/formal sector divide.
- II. Firm heterogeneity and SME constraints affect compensation practices, job quality, and the capacity to absorb skilled youth.
- III. Compensation & retention issues feed into informal migration and youth dissatisfaction.
- IV. The policy/institutional environment underpins whether firms can formalize, whether training programs are effective, whether informal workers are protected, and whether job-quality improves.
- V. All of the above contribute to the overall employment dynamics: how workers move across sectors, how stable and decent their jobs are, how skills are utilized, how firms grow or stagnate, how government and industry respond.

Thus, to “decompress” the complexities of Nigeria’s employment landscape, one must adopt a systems view: examine how education, skills, firms, compensation, sectors and policies interact rather than treating each dimension in isolation.

### **Strategic Pathways and Implications for Stakeholders**

Having decompressed the core complexities of Nigerian employment dynamics, the next step is translating these insights

into practical, actionable strategies. Each stakeholder like academia, industry, policy makers, and students has a role to play. But no single actor can solve these challenges in isolation. The path forward lies in alignment, coordination, and systems-level engagement.

## **For Academia and Students**

### **Strategic Recommendations:**

- i. **Curriculum Redesign:** Academic curricula must be reoriented toward market-relevant, competency-based learning. This involves integrating soft skills (communication, problem-solving), digital literacy, and technical expertise aligned with industry demand.
- ii. **Industry Linkages:** Universities should deepen partnerships with firms to co-develop syllabi, facilitate internships, and align research with business needs. This ensures that students gain practical exposure and that enterprises can shape talent pipelines.
- iii. **Entrepreneurship Education:** As highlighted in Prof. Johnson's work (Enimola, Orugun & Nafiu, 2019), youths need entrepreneurial skills not just to start businesses but to innovate within firms. Entrepreneurship must become embedded in both theory and practice.
- iv. **Lifelong Learning Systems:** Given technological and market changes, institutions should promote lifelong learning through flexible certifications, modular courses, and digital platforms.

**Implication:** The academic sector must shift from being a certificate factory to becoming a dynamic, responsive engine of employability, innovation, and talent alignment.

## **For Industry and Firms**

### **Strategic Recommendations:**

- i. **Human Capital Investment:** Firms especially SMEs should treat employee development as a strategic asset. Training, upskilling, knowledge management and systems thinking are investments in performance and sustainability.
- ii. **Fair Compensation and HR Practices:** As shown in my 2014 study, equitable wages and structured HR systems improve job satisfaction, retention, and worker productivity. Compensation should reflect skills and market benchmarks.
- iii. **Institutional Collaboration:** Firms should work closely with universities, polytechnics and training institutions to influence curricula, access talent, and co-develop skilling programs. Collaborative recruitment and apprenticeship models should be expanded.
- iv. **Formalization & Job Quality:** Firms operating informally should be supported and motivated to register, comply with labour standards, and offer decent work conditions. Formalization improves worker rights, firm visibility, and access to capital.

**Implication:** Employment growth depends not only on the quantity of enterprises but their quality, how firms invest in people, systems, and partnerships.

## **For Policy Makers and Government**

### **Strategic Recommendations:**

- i. **Integrate Youth Employment with Skills Ecosystems:** Employment policies should be embedded within broader human capital strategies that link education, skills development, and firm needs. This includes support for technical/vocational education (TVET), digital training and apprenticeship systems.
- ii. **Strengthen Institutional Coordination:** Ministries responsible for labour, youth, education, and economic planning must operate in concert. Employment is a cross-cutting issue; fragmentation breeds inefficiency and program overlap.
- iii. **Outcome-Based Monitoring:** Policies must be guided by real-time labour market data and rigorous evaluations. Employment metrics should move beyond “number of jobs created” to include job quality, sustainability, and alignment with skills.
- iv. **Incentivize Formal Employment & SME Support:** Fiscal and regulatory incentives can encourage firms to formalize. Governments must also reduce compliance burdens, expand SME credit and innovation support, and foster localized enterprise hubs.

**Implication:** Government's role is to create an enabling ecosystem, one that reduces barriers, fosters coherence, and builds capacity across education and enterprise systems.

### **Recommendations**

- i. Organizations (public and private) should ensure that wage/salary structures are reviewed periodically to reflect inflation, cost of living, and labour market competition. My study recommends that wage policies reflect the dynamic nature of the economy (Nafiu & Orugun, 2014).
- ii. Human Resources must prioritize reliable payment schedules, clear communication of components of pay (basic salary, allowances, bonuses), and mechanisms for grievance or adjustment when delays occur.
- iii. Compensation should not just be a flat wage but part of a system that rewards performance, encourages retention, and motivates workers to invest in skill development. This is particularly important in formal employment and youth employment programs.
- iv. Youth employment programs should combine employment placements, enterprise training, mentorship and incubation to give youth multiple employment pathways (formal job or business).
- v. Conduct regional economic mapping to identify sectors with potential growth, infrastructure readiness, youth interest and connect training to those sectors. For instance, in Kogi State, aligning entrepreneurship training with agriculture, agro-processing or tax/education sectors as N-Power did.
- vi. Universities and polytechnics should partner with industry to co-design entrepreneurial programs, guest mentoring,

- live business projects, internships and technology adoption training. This ensures better alignment between what youths learn and what employers/markets demand.
- vii. Given Nigeria's evolving digital economy, entrepreneurial training must include digital literacy, e-commerce, remote work, online platforms—ensuring youths are competitive in both local and global labour markets.
  - viii. Government and industry associations should provide resources, training, mentorship and grants to help SMEs build human/intellectual capital (training staff, setting up systems, knowledge management, networks). This will enhance their growth potential and job-creation capacity.
  - ix. Firms (especially SMEs) often overlook investment in processes, databases, knowledge systems, networks, partnerships. Policies could support this via tax incentives, innovation vouchers, grants for technology adoption and network membership. Investing in relational capital (linkages to other firms, universities, markets) helps firms access new opportunities, scale and hire more.
  - x. Employment programs and SME development initiatives should measure not only jobs created but also the human/intellectual capital stock of firms (training hours, systems instituted, networks developed). This helps ensure jobs are sustainable and high quality rather than simply headcount increases.

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