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## COUNSELING AND EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC ERA UNEMPLOYMENT RATE ASSESSMENT

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### ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the effects of the unemployment rate assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic era on counseling and education. The study emphasized the COVID-19 idea as well as the unemployment notion. The impact of COVID-19 on employment was also explored. It also discussed the counseling and educational implications for developing the employability skills required in today's fiercely competitive and selective labor market in order to lower the jobless rate in the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic in the twenty-first century. Once more, it considered job counseling as something that ought to be made a need in the post-COVID-19 period of the 21st century in order to lower the unemployment rate. Therefore, career counseling might be a wealth of knowledge for providing the employability abilities that employers of labour look for from job applicants during job interviews. The article included recommendations that, if taken up and put into practice, may assist to lower the high rate of unemployment experienced globally following the COVID-19 epidemic in the twenty-first century. The report emphasizes how important it is for governments to be able to address the problems associated with unemployment. If there is increased cooperation and collaboration among peoples and nations, this task may be carried out with ease and efficiency.

### KEY WORDS

Assessment, Unemployment, COVID-19 Pandemic, Counselling .



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## Introduction

One of the biggest issues confronting the world today is unemployment, which has gotten worse as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, which the World Health Organization labeled a worldwide pandemic on March 11, 2020. Many governments use unemployment statistics to gauge anything from economic stability to citizen contentment because unemployment is a contentious problem in many of the world's economies (Egbule, 2018). The protracted entire suspension of socioeconomic operations that the government imposed as a policy reaction to slow the pathogen's spread of the virus actually made COVID-19 worse for the jobless rate internationally.

Many people lost their jobs during those times when socioeconomic activity was halted, especially those with insecure employment situations who were laid off since the majority of their companies were unable to pay their salaries. And in the current COVID-19 pandemic age, where unemployment rates have been rising globally without any discernible measures being done to mitigate its negative consequences, this has negative implications on employment. One wonders what role counseling and education may play in helping people develop the employable skills necessary in today's fiercely competitive and selective labor market to lower unemployment rates in the COVID-19 epidemic era. This question precisely reflects the problem addressed in this paper.

## Concept of COVID-19

Nwokeji and Ebirim (2021) claim that the COVID-19, which started in China, has now spread over the entire world. Corona virus is a highly contagious viral disease that has the potential to cause mild to severe respiratory illness, according to the World Health Organization (2020). The COVID-19 outbreak was classified as a worldwide pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020, a Wednesday. According to Nwokeji and Ebirim (2021), who referenced Mayo Experts (2020), Covid-19 began in December 2019 in Wuhan, the Chinese province of Hubei's capital. This is consistent with Donald Trump's claim that the Wuhan Institute of Virology was the genesis of COVID-19.

The virus is referred to as SARS-COV-2, short for severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus. The condition is referred to as COVID-19, or Corona Virus Disease 2019. As a result, it is a newly found pandemic that was not known to affect people. The WHO received the initial report on it on December 31, 2019. (<https://www.medscape.com>).

In addition, Mayo Experts (2000), cited in Nwokeji and Ebirim (2001), stated that the signs and symptoms of COVID-19 may manifest themselves on the affected person two to fourteen days after exposure, and they may include, among other things, fever, cough, shortness of breath or difficulty breathing, as well as fatigue, aches, runny nose, sore throat, headache, diarrhoea, and vomiting. Some individuals who are affected may also lose their sense of taste or smell. However, according to certain research, some COVID-19 sufferers could not even exhibit any symptoms at all. From mild to severe, COVID-19 symptoms can range in intensity.

However, older people and those with underlying medical conditions like cardiovascular disease, heart disease, diabetes, lung disease, chronic respiratory disease, and cancer are more likely to develop serious illness (WHO, 2020). Most young people infected with the COVID-19 virus typically experience mild to moderate respiratory illness and recover without needing much special treatment.

According to research, the 2019 corona virus illness (COVID-19) can spread from sick people to others, especially when they are in close proximity (within around two meters or six feet). When a virus-carrying person coughs, sneezes, or speaks, respiratory droplets are generated that transmit the infection. A person close may breathe in these droplets or they may land in their mouth or nose. Additionally, HPV can be transmitted if someone touches something that has the virus on it and then touches their mouth, nose, or eyes before washing their hands.

### Concept of Unemployment

People who can work but are unable to find acceptable, well-paying jobs while actively seeking them out are said to be unemployed. In other terms, the term "unemployment" may be used to describe a scenario in which people who are actively seeking employment but are unable to do so. Jobs are defined in this context as work-related activities that people perform either full- or part-time and that serve as their primary sources of income. According to Ndubuisi (2012), unemployment is a state in which those who are capable, willing, and able to work are unable to do so (<https://theconversation.com>). When someone lack a job and actively seek one, they are said to be unemployed, also known as jobless (<https://courses.lumenlearning.com>). Depending on the definitional criteria used, unemployment rates might differ. However, it is widely acknowledged that demographic groups including children under the age of 18, retirees, and persons who are chronically injured and unable to work are not included in unemployment statistics (<https://mint.intuit.com>).

On the other hand, economists have divided unemployment into three broad categories: cyclical unemployment, which is the kind that happens when demand for products and services declines significantly. The result is that it pushes employers of labor to fire a high number of employees in an effort to reduce expenses based on the notion that doing so will frustrate employees. This was exactly people's experiences in the era of COVID-19 pandemic where many employers of labour laid-off their workers as a result of lockdown of socio-economic activities during the long periods of the pandemic; frictional unemployment, which is the type of unemployment that occurs when workers voluntarily or involuntarily leave their old jobs with a view of searching for another better one where they can be more productive but haven't yet found new ones and structural unemployment, which is the type of unemployment that occurs when there is shift in the economy that makes it difficult if not impossible for the labour market to provide jobs for everyone who needs one as a result of the mismatch created by market conditions between the skills of the unemployed individuals and the skills of the needed for the available jobs.

### Effects of Covid-19 on Unemployment

The COVID-19 epidemic has significantly harmed employment because it has led to the world's biggest employment difficulties. Additionally, the general jobless rate has increased. In fact, studies have shown that the COVID-19 pandemic brought about the social stigma associated with job loss on those who lost their jobs during the COVID-19, and there is a tendency for those who lost their jobs during the pandemic crisis to likely accept new jobs below their skill levels in this era of the post COVID-19 pandemic, a situation referred to as "underemployment," in an effort to make ends meet. Therefore, COVID-19's impacts on employment are profound, widespread, and have led to historically high levels of job loss.

Implications for counseling in terms of increasing employability skills necessary in today's very competitive and selective labor market in order to lower unemployment rates during the COVID-19 epidemic period. In order to connect job seekers with potential employers and lower

unemployment rates in this post-COVID-19 pandemic era, employment counseling has a lot of implications for promoting employability skills needed in today's highly competitive and selective labor market. This is especially true for Nigerian citizens. Vocational counseling is a subset of employment counseling (Nwamuo, 2001). One of the most well-liked services provided by professionally trained counselors in educational institutions and social settings to people looking for employment or people who are already in the workforce but may be unhappy with their current jobs or wish for a better job position is career counseling (Egbule, 2006). They desire to switch to another relevant occupational field as a result, either inside or outside of their existing work settings. Employment counseling was described by Nwamuo (2001), referenced in Nwokeji (2020), as the support provided to anybody needing assistance in selecting a profession or switching from one profession to another, within the context of vocational advice services.

Employment counseling, according to Tong-Hing (2000), is a sort of counseling used to identify a person's professional interests, ambitions, aspirations, abilities, and competences in a variety of occupational domains. He continued by saying that the information obtained is crucial for determining where to place a certain job seeker or employee who is switching jobs in order to get the most out of him or her. To this aim, Nwokeji (2020) said that professional counselors are now urgently concerned about the necessity to provide job seekers with knowledge about the abilities necessary and critical for landing a job during employment counseling.

This is a product of today's very competitive and selective labor market, where the unemployment rate is alarmingly high, forcing companies to hunt for job candidates who possess particular talents and attributes in addition to academic credentials. Even though they may not be job-specific, employability skills are crucial for increasing a job applicant's performance and value in the workplace. They may also affect a job applicant's capacity to advance professionally. What are these employable skills, then? Transferable abilities called employability skills are helpful in almost any employment. They entail the acquisition of skills, information, or attitudes that increase your attractiveness to employers. The terms employment skills, soft skills, work-readiness skills, and fundamental skills are all frequently used to refer to employability skills. They frequently help you perform better, make less mistakes, and encourage teamwork with your coworkers, which enables you to carry out your job more successfully.

Even though they may not be included in a job description, employability skills are significant ones that can increase a candidate's appeal to potential employers. The biggest advantage of possessing these talents is that they may make a person stand out from other job applicants who are fighting for the same position. Even though other job applicants may have the same credentials and experience, you could have a greater chance of being recruited if you possess employability skills that are especially beneficial for the position you're applying for. Employability abilities are highly valued by employers; some are innate, while others may be learned through school, employment, or everyday practice (Egbule & Egbule, 2008). Some of the essential job abilities may already be present, but one may always endeavor to build new ones. Indeed, Career Guide (2019) highlighted a number of critical employability abilities that job searchers must possess and that businesses seek for. These abilities include, among others;

**Communication Skills:** One of the most crucial employability skills required for efficient communication in every organization is communication competence. Five components make up the communication process: the sender, recipient, message, medium, and feedback. Together, these components enable you to communicate effectively and efficiently, preventing misunderstandings and

errors that might otherwise occur. Because they may increase a business' productivity and efficiency and assist minimize the loss of important time and resources, strong communication skills increase your employability. Being a successful communicator entails listening to your coworkers' directions, ideas, and goals as well as clearly expressing your views and ideas to reach certain outcomes. You might need to be proficient in a variety of communication abilities, including written, verbal, nonverbal, and visual, depending on the career you seek. Communication is the best method to get better, therefore try to do it as much as you can. Some of the activities that can help one develop better communication skills include:

- Communicating on social media.
- Joining a local club.
- Practicing awareness of your facial expressions and body language.

**Teamwork Skills:** A person with good collaboration abilities is able to collaborate effectively with their coworkers in order to accomplish a common objective. Collaboration and other teamwork abilities might improve one's chances of getting hired since they may enable one to assist a business in more successfully achieving its objectives. These abilities can also help create a more supportive workplace. One must be at ease working with others, assume responsibility for their fair portion of the job, and contribute to the team's objectives in order to become a great team player. One may undertake a variety of activities to improve his or her teamwork abilities, some of which are as follows:

- Voluntarily helping co-workers to accomplish tasks.
- Working with others in a local organization.
- Joining a sports team, social group and religious group.

**Reliability Skills:** Since reliability fosters trust between a person and their employer, it increases one's employability. A person is a dependable employee if they routinely do your assignments on schedule, provide high-quality work, and make few mistakes. He or she must also have the ability to reply to emails and questions right away and only make commitments they can keep. The following admirable behaviors can help one become more dependable:

- Consistently meeting or exceeding his/her expected levels of work performance.
- Creating schedules for his/her daily tasks and maintaining them.
- Acknowledging his/her mistakes and making a conscious effort to avoid them in the future.

**Problem-solving Skills:** Identification of important difficulties and their ramifications, a thorough comprehension of the challenges, and selection of the best solutions are all part of problem-solving abilities. One must be able to break down more complicated situations into smaller, more manageable pieces in order to make them simpler to comprehend. The ability to solve problems can assist one's future employer maintain an effective operating process and more successfully accomplish goals, which can set one apart from other job candidates. A competent problem-solver may be crucial in resolving difficulties, empowering their team to overcome challenges and find solutions to complicated situations. To solve issues effectively, one may need a certain collection of sub-skills, such as investigation, analysis, and decision-making, depending on the position for which they are seeking. Therefore, one can become a better problem-solver by:

- Undertaking research assignments and projects.
- Participating in brainstorming sessions.
- Regularly developing his/her skills by solving puzzles and playing games.

**Organizational and planning Skills:** It's crucial to be able to successfully plan and organize. This is due to the fact that it enhances workflow while saving one's time, effort, and money. It guarantees that tasks and projects are finished on time, avoids misunderstandings and mistakes that might cost the company money. As a result, in order to be an effective organizer and planner, a person must be able to recognize activities, give them a priority, set deadlines for them, and accomplish them on time. If in a leadership role, he or she must create organized procedures for attaining objectives and properly allocating work. One can develop organizational and planning skills by:

- Developing a timetable for his/her daily activities.
- Organizing an event.
- Writing down his/her tasks and activities in a planned form.

Professional counselors are supposed to educate the potential job seekers the following three components of employment counseling during employment counseling:

**Self-Assessment:** Before beginning the search, the client must first understand oneself, be aware of his or her own inherent abilities and limits, and be aware of the needs of the employment (Egbule, 2006; Ugoji & Egbule, 2002). In employment counseling, the client's self-assessment is crucial because such evaluations are typically created in a way to identify the client's personality type, his or her vocational interests, aptitudes, and values, as well as their educational backgrounds and qualifications, any prior employment experiences they may have had, and other personal details that will be useful in placing the client in an occupational field. Here, the counselor collects this information using a variety of psychological diagnostic tools.

**Career Exploration (career planning process):** In employment counseling, career exploration simply refers to the job analysis process. Career exploration is the second crucial element of job counseling, according to Tong-Hing (2000). In this situation, the professional counselor collaborates with the client to discover appropriate employment sectors for him or her based on the match between the specific job requirements and the client's personality traits, areas of professional interest, aptitude, values, and career aspirations.

**Job search:** Another crucial aspect of employment counseling is job searching. It is the process of looking for job vacancies both locally and abroad. This occurs when a person is either jobless, unsatisfied with their current position, or yearns for a better one. Here, the expert counselor helps such clients find employment vacancies by utilizing a range of techniques, such as:

- **Networking strategy:** Numerous job vacancies go unnoticed for a very long time. The word of mouth fills them. Because of this, networking is one of the best job search techniques. In fact, studies have showed that networking is how people find 50% of all employment. Unfortunately, a lot of people mistakenly believe that networking is solely employed by well-connected elites, yet anybody can benefit from it, even those with little or no relationships in the corporate world. Therefore, networking is just telling your network of friends, family, coworkers, and acquaintances that you are looking for a job. You only request that they remember you. If they become aware of any jobs that match your qualifications or know of somebody who may. The majority of businesses prefer to fill open positions through personal recommendations and word of mouth. Here, the expert counselor helps the client compile a lengthy list of all of his or her friends, acquaintances, and coworkers who may be helpful sources for his or her job quest. Everyone should participate in this brainstorming exercise. The professional counselor instructs the client on how to mention to persons on the list they

have created that they are looking for a job because connections can come from unexpected places. According to research, the top jobs are not usually included in the daily newspapers. Thus, 50% of people found their employment through friends and family, 35% did so by getting in touch with the employers directly, 10% did so through online services or newspaper advertisements, and 5% did so through educational institutions. In light of this, it is true that the job market is extremely competitive and selective. However, if you thoroughly prepared for it through career counseling, there is a job for you.

- **Direct Employer Contact Strategy:** For fear of being turned down, job seekers frequently ignore this tactic. Simply choose the employers you would want to work for through research, and then get in touch with each one through mail or phone to let them know how you can be of service and request a meeting to talk about job options. The likelihood of selection increases with the number of firms contacted.
- **Employment Advertisement Strategy:** This tactic includes of all positions that are openly advertised; you may learn about them via advertisements in publications, television, and newspapers, as well as from executive search firms and recruitment agencies. Although the likelihood of finding employment through the public job market is minimal, you should nevertheless take notice of any advertised job vacancies near you. It's critical to resist giving up due to a lack of a supportive response. An advertisement frequently produces 5000 or more resumes for the company to analyze. Advert responses are prone to become lost during processing, therefore whomever is responsible for reviewing them normally conducts a pre-screening to weed out any candidates who don't precisely fit the job requirements. Your challenge is to get a favourable consideration. Therefore, the most important thing is not to get tired in sending a resume that reveals that you have the qualities the advert has asked for.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this essay has attempted to explore the COVID-19 and unemployment concepts. It also looked at how COVID-19 affected employment. Additionally, counseling and educational implications for developing employability skills necessary in today's extremely competitive and selective labor market were explored, with ideas emphasized, in order to lower unemployment rate in the wake of the COVID-19 epidemic of the twenty-first century.

## Suggestions

In view of the need to reduce the apparent unemployment rate around the world in the post COVID-19 pandemic of the 21st century, the following suggestions are made:

- \* Government should launch public work schemes in order to create job opportunities especially for those who have lost their jobs due to the pandemic crisis.
- \* Government and private sectors should work hand in hand in order to stimulate productive economy that will aid in job creation, thereby reducing the rate of unemployment.
- \* Government should create favourable conditions necessary for economic diversification which will in turn generate employment opportunities.
- \* Employment of counsellors should be made part and parcel of the school curriculum right from Basic school level of education to tertiary level in order to equip potential job seekers with information on the skills essential and crucial for gaining employment upon graduating from school.

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