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Developing Approach to Employability of Nigerian Graduates in Labour Market: Need for Curriculum Improvement

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Abstract

The term employability has become a common name amongst educators, researchers, and employers. It refers to the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to look for work and continue successfully in a career. Employability has been a challenge for graduates of Nigerian higher education institutions (HEIs) due to their failure to meet the current labour market expectations. Current Nigerian graduates have consistently not acquired the skills needed for success in the workplace to learn and thrive continuously in rapidly changing world. HEIs have been blamed for producing graduates who fail to meet employment demands in the labour market. Several distortions in the higher education systems are responsible for youth not being able to obtain and keep employment. Failures to collaborate are obvious as employers continue to voice concern that the curriculum and standard teaching methods are not generating the graduates and future leaders they desire to hire. Employers are more satisfied with graduates who possess core skills, such as creative and critical thinking, interpersonal, and leadership's skills, that will help graduates to identify and analyse complex phenomena, evaluate and converge new ideas. Problem solving, communication, and life-long learning are now the basic requirements to compete and be successful. Collaboration and reflection will be a transformation of the relations between the students and the teaching staff and students are required to make decisions about how to complete a task. Future employers, institutions and students must collaborate to ensure graduates have the needed skills for employability and success. Thus, the interactive session will focus on what should be the specific innovations, programmes and approaches to improve the graduate employability in Nigeria.

Key words: Approach, Employability, Graduates, Labour Market, Curriculum Improvement

Introduction

Millions of young graduates are missing out on a quality education to give them a fair start in life and many millions lack the opportunities needed to develop skills throughout their lives and respond to the rapidly changing needs of work and our societies. Advancing cooperative and work integrated education to inspire, innovate and evolve has a much greater role to play in meeting this challenge and the need for this year conference theme.

Employability rests on the assumption that the economic welfare of individuals and the competitive advantage of nations have come to depend on the knowledge, skills and enterprise of the workforce. Those with degree-level qualifications are seen to play an important role in managing the 'knowledge-driven' economy of the future.

The phenomenon of unemployed graduates is a worry to the Nigeria government. Various programmes have been launched to overcome this phenomenon so that graduates will have the skills needed by the industry. This phenomenon may be caused by oversupply of graduates in the job market and graduates unable to meet the skills needed by the industry and the skills not fully polished while the graduates are still studying. The phenomenon of unemployment is not only conversant in Nigeria, but also felt in many developing countries like Philippines, Indonesia, India, Thailand and the developed countries such as Britain and the United States (Ahmad, 2009).

There is need for graduates to be competitive to ensure they survive in the job market. To be these competitive, well-educated graduates need to equip themselves with various skills. These skills can be an attribute to them and it can determine their marketability. Employability is a term that is often used as a measurement by employers on graduates' marketability. Hapidah & Sahandri (2011) has proposed four employability skills that every graduate should have, which are academic, connectivity skills, personality management, and exploration skills. If the graduates should have these four skills, they will not have any problem in the job market.

The fact that there are a lot of competitions in the job market, it is good to have graduate with an entrepreneur skill. These skills are associated with attributes that enable graduates to have the strength and consistency in building their own careers and be able to be innovative employers that can build wealth and create jobs (Kadderi, 2010).

Increasing the employability skills of learners to prepare them for their working life in the 21st Century is a key concern for educators and policy-makers. Most countries are focusing on improving their national vocational skills framework and infrastructure to prepare the workforce for current and future needs.

The employability skills required are not always developed due to gaps in agreement and collaboration between graduate students, higher education, and potential employers. This often results in graduates not prepared to enter the workforce successfully. Consequently, we need to approach this challenge with a mind-set that bridges the traditional divide between borders, sectors, academia and industry.

Now is the time to deepen our partnerships to ensure that we can provide employability skills to young people, a quality education to all regardless of circumstances, and to find practical ways for technology to speed up our progress. With the PCF9 Conference, we need to work together to address this challenge.

Graduate Unemployment

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) defines unemployment as the proportion of the labour force that is available for work but did not work for at least 39 hours in the week (Central Bank of Nigeria Annual Report, 2008). Graduate unemployment, refers to the unemployment among people who have graduated from tertiary institutions and who are qualified to work but do not work at any given point in time. In the Nigerian context, graduate unemployment refers to a situation where tertiary institution graduates, after finishing their National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), and are willing and able to work but fail to secure jobs (Akande, 2014).

Concept of Employability Skills

Employability skills can be defined as the ability of graduates to possess and exhibit the knowledge, attributes and attitudes needed to attain and maintain jobs in which they can be successful and fulfilled not only in their occupations but in life as well.

Challenges to Graduates Employability

Responses of employers of labour on the competencies and performance of recent graduates reveal that certain skills are lacking in the graduates which tertiary institutions are churning out into the labour market. They express dismay in the preparation of graduates in those applied technical skills necessary for solving problems and enhancing business productivity.

Akande (2014) stated that only 25% of graduating students were employable while the remaining 75% were not because they lacked requisite skills such as technical knowledge, English proficiency and critical thinking. This increasing trend in non-academic job requirements has posed a serious problem to the country and our higher education system.

Dabalén, et al (2000), and Ogundowole (2002) have identified decline in staff quantity which is reflected in the high rate of human capital flight. Professionals and qualified lecturers have left Africa for developed world in search of jobs. The flight of the educated Africans from the continent, in the UK

were 134,500 Africans: 14,500 had first degrees and 4,600 had advanced degrees. Of all the ethnic minorities in the UK, Africans formed the largest percentage with recognized educational qualifications (Appleton & Teal, 1998). Estimated 100,000 skilled Africans worked in Europe and North America. These skilled Africans were doctors, research scientists and university teachers.

Another factor is a wide gap between student enrolment and the number of qualified instructors. Student enrolment in our tertiary institutions has outpaced the number of qualified instructors. Other causes are outdated curricula, shortages of learning resources, bad governance, deficient inputs, increasing class size and inadequate financing (Abiodun, 2010).

The high population growth rate of 3.5 percent per annum, which accompanies an already large national population of over 167 million people. In addition, deficient school curricula, poor teacher training, and the failure of educational institutions to provide their students the appropriate skills to make them employable. Schools in rural areas are generally more deficient in infrastructure, teaching facilities and teacher quality than schools in urban areas, this may help account for the high growth in rural unemployed youth.

In addition, lack of vibrant industries to absorb competent graduates. The youth unemployment situation has been aggravated by flawed and inconsistent public policies on employment.

Policymakers confront inadequate information and data that can form the basis of effective planning. Employment data are very hard to obtain. In the absence of such data, policymakers tend to rely on cross-sectional household surveys, which are often inconsistent and full of errors. The lack of data makes it difficult for policymakers to understand the nature of the employment challenge and make informed decisions on how to support young people in the labour market (Asaju et al., 2014 & Iwayemi, 2014).

Employers continue to voice concern that the curriculum and standard teaching methods are not generating the graduates and future leaders, they desire to hire. Literature revealed numerous challenging opportunities for the various stakeholders to collaborate if the issue of skills development in higher education graduates is to improve (Rateau & Kaufman, 2009).

Sibley & Parmell, (2008) stated that employers have expressed a need for students who can communicate, value teamwork, solve problems, acquire knowledge that is broad and deep, and do that for their entire career.

Basically, this paper addressed the following:

1. The skills that the employers looked out that favour the new graduates' employability
2. What higher education institutions do in developing employability skills of graduates
3. What higher education institutions should do to enhance employability skills of graduates.

Contention exists regarding exactly what constitutes employability and what skills the graduates need for entering the labour market. In the context of a rapidly changing information- and knowledge-intensive economy, graduates must be able to proactively navigate the world of work and self-manage the career building process.

The following are the **identify skills that favour graduate's employability:**

- Creative and critical thinking,
- Leaderships skills,
- Problem solving skills,
- Communication skills
- Life-long learning skills
- Computer technology skills
- Time management skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Initiative skills, and

- Emotional intelligence skills ((Paranto & Kelkar, 1999, Rosch & Anthony, 2012).

Graduates to be successful in the work environment, employers desire strong communications and interpersonal skills. Graduates` willingness and curiosity to become life-long learners has been identified as a critical requirement for success in both personal and professional life (Fallows & Weller, 2000). Life-long learning skills become increasingly important to maintain pace in our diverse, rapidly changing, and complex world. With the rapid pace of change and complexity, what comes is an increasing need for strong and effective leadership to guide this change; Nigeria is in a leadership crisis, that requires more and better leadership in all areas of our life endeavour.

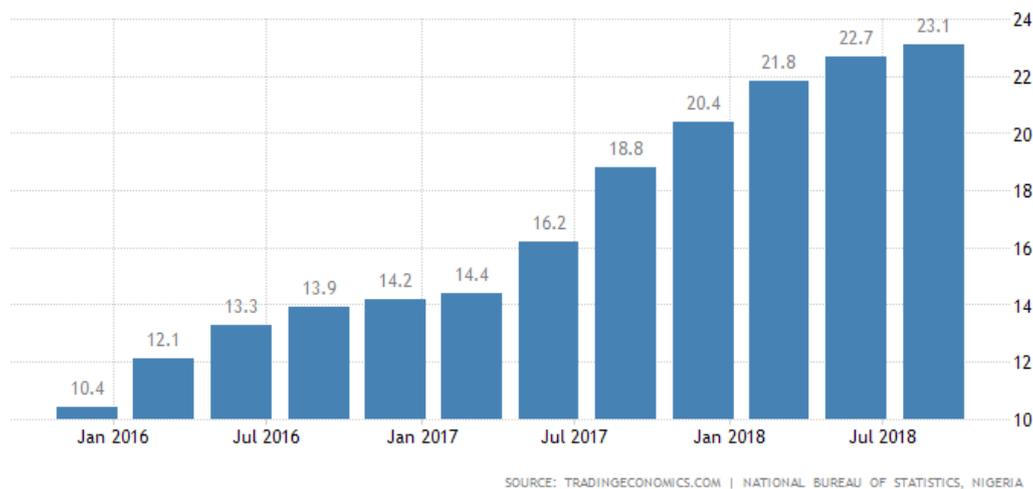
Statistical Analysis of Data Based on Unemployment Rates and the Number of Graduates Produced

In Nigeria, the unemployment rate measures the number of people actively looking for a job as a percentage of the labour force. Nigeria`s population is said to have reached about 167 million people (National Bureau of Statistics). The National Population Commission (NPoC, 2013) states about half of the population is made up of youth, defined as individuals between 15 and 34 years of age. As the youth population grows, so does the unemployment rate. Unemployed youth numbered about 11.1 million.

Youth unemployment rate in Nigeria decreased to 36.50 percent in the third quarter of 2018 from 38 percent in the second quarter of 2018. Youth unemployment rate in Nigeria averaged 23.63 percent from 2014 until 2018, reaching an all-time high of 38 percent in the second quarter of 2018 and a record low of 11.70 percent in the fourth quarter of 2014.

According to the survey, taken by 90,000 people, 47% of the country`s university graduates are unemployed in Africa`s largest economy. By some estimates Nigerian tertiary education institutions produce up to 500,000 graduates every year and there are also Nigerian graduates who study abroad who come home to compete for jobs. (<https://tradingeconomics.com/nigeria/unemployment-rate>).

Below is a table showing Nigerian Unemployment rate



Source: Tradingeconomics.com National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria

States in Nigeria and their Rate of Underemployment and Unemployment

Under- and Unemployed (%)

Jigawa 62.4, Rivers 61.4, Kaduna 58.6, Yobe 58.1, Akwa Ibom 58.8, Nasarawa 53.4, Borno 51.2, Kano 51.2, Katsina 49.4, Gombe 49.3, Plateau 48.1, Bayelsa 47.8, Sokoto 47.4, Imo 46.5, Abia 45.3, Kogi 43,

Cross River 40.5, Niger 40.4, Edo 40, Bauchi 38.8, Enugu 37.6, Ebonyi 35.5, Adamawa 34.6 Benue 34.6, Ondo 34.5, Zamfara 34, Lagos 32.7, FCT 32.5, Kebbi 31.5, Kwara 31.3, Anambra 29.5, Ekiti 28.3, Oyo 23, Ogun 21, Osun 19, Taraba 13.4 (National Bureau of Statistics 2018).

Major Employers of Labour in Nigeria

Nigeria is one of Africa's most prolific oil-producing countries and an important part of Chevron's business. Chevron is one of the largest oil producers in Nigeria and one of its largest investors. One of Chevron's largest exploration and production operations is located in Nigeria, making Chevron an important part of Nigeria's energy picture and economy. Chevron's operations in Nigeria include exploration, production, blending, manufacturing and marketing.

Chevron Nigeria Limited (CNL) provides temporary employment to people required to participate in mandatory learning programs to gain work experience in a chosen career, such as university, polytechnic, high school students. Chevron provides an opportunity for interns to learn about the company, its business, culture and core values. The internship program serves as part of Chevron's contribution to building capabilities in Nigeria.

Chevron's compensation and benefits programs are designed to be competitive within local labour markets and to meet the needs of employees living in Nigeria. From the deep water Agbami Field to a gas-to-liquids project in the Niger Delta, their oil and natural gas operations in Nigeria employ thousands of workers and produce vital energy (Chevron in Nigeria: Career at Chevron, 2019).

In the institution where I teach, the university since 2014 gives automatic employment to the best two graduating students of each department in the university. This is to reduce unemployment and to attract and retain the best brains to the university.

Accreditations Council efforts with Regards to Curriculum Revision: National Universities Commission (NUC)

NUC Act CAP N81 Law of the Federation of Nigeria and Education National Minimum Standard and Establishment of Institution) Act CAP E3 Law of the Federation of Nigeria 2004, empowers the National Universities Commission to lay down minimum standards for the Universities in the Federation and to accredit their degrees and other academic awards after obtaining prior approval through the Honourable Minister of Education from the President, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces.

In its bid to comply with the provisions of the Act, the National Universities Commission through the use of experts from the universities developed the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) in respect of disciplines taught in Nigerian Universities. The development of the Minimum Academic Standards and their subsequent approval provide the basis for the accreditation of all degree programmes taught in Nigerian universities as they serve as reference documents for the accreditation of programmes in the Nigerian university system.

Other body regulating Nigerian institutions, says the commissions has started reviewing Nigeria's higher education curriculum. This move was with a view to improving the quality of the system in order to make graduates globally competitive. The government was concerned about the complaint by industry employers that graduates were unemployable.

Higher Education Institutions Role in Developing Employability Skills of Graduates

The role of the institution in career preparation has been to improve and increase students' content knowledge. Employability skills, including leadership, are learned through both the classroom and meaningful experiences (Northouse, 2010; Rae, 2007). Various educators recognize the need for change and are in the process of change. Educators are making changes to curriculum and teaching methods to provide the required thinking skills the graduates need.

- Management of universities education in Nigeria should collaborate with employers of labour in designing curriculum for courses to meet the reality of the modern labour market;
- lifelong learning (LLL) should be an integral part of higher education systems;
- Higher education should encourage people skills such as collaboration, teamwork and cross-cultural experience; problem-solving abilities, inquiry, critical thinking and creativity should be part of the curriculum;
- Professional strengths such as communication, work ethic and technological agility should be part of the expected learning outcomes of the institutions;
- Internship and work study should be part of universities students' educational experience. The management of various universities in Nigeria should endeavour to develop the psychomotor of the students in the area of development of practical skills that will enable them function optimally in to labour market.
- Entrepreneurial village should be established in every institution in Nigeria so as to equip students with skills that will enable them to be self-reliant, without necessarily waiting for unavailable Jobs.

Information from the university to the labour market will ease the transition from student to worker. Graduates would like careers advice. Alumni should suggest to their institution that graduates could do better in communicating with them. To improved contact between graduate and institution post-study is the key, this would allow universities to keep in touch with their alumni.

Higher Education Developing Employability Skills of New Graduates through:

- Team work
- Written Communication
- Autonomous Work
- Subject – Specific Skills
- Foreign Language
- Pressure Management
- Work in International Settings
- Decision Making

What Higher Education can do to Enhance Employability Skills of New Graduates

- Sector-Specific Traineeship
- Career Guidance Services
- Cooperation with Employers Representatives in Designing Curriculum.
- Cooperation for Innovation and Exchange of Good Practices.
- Engaging students in multiple roles and perspectives which will enable the students to examine the assignments from different points of view.
- Collaboration which will be a transformation of relations between the students and the teaching staff, students are required to make decisions about how to complete a task.
- Strategic partnerships in the field of education, training and youth.
- To map good practices to match graduates` skills with labour market demands.

Specific Innovations, Programmes and Approaches to Improve Graduate Employability in Nigeria

Ascertaining policies that have worked in addressing unemployment in Nigeria is rather difficult in light of the incredibly high and rising unemployment rate. Consequently, certain institutional arrangements and agencies have been established to promote employment among youth.

Three of the current and most prominent programs include:

- The Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P)
- The Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOU-WIN) and
- The Osun State Youth Employment Scheme (O'YES), among others.

- The SURE-P is the flagship of recent efforts to provide job opportunities to graduates of tertiary institutions. It is more or less a whole range of activities and programmatic schemes, including the Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS), Community Services Scheme (CSS), Vocational Training Scheme (VTS), and Community Services, Women and Youth Empowerment (CSWYE), among others.
- The YOU-WIN program was designed to create job opportunities specifically, for graduates of tertiary institutions that choose to go into business as entrepreneurs. Participants are required to develop and execute their own business ideas that will provide jobs for themselves and other unemployed youths who may or not be graduates. (NPC, 2013).
- At the state level, the government established various forms of employment-creating programs. The most prominent one is the Osun Youth Empowerment Scheme (OYES) established by the state of Osun. The scheme provides a series of employment opportunities for participants as traffic controllers, sanitation and environmental officials, security personnel, and other works and services.

Why the Programmes Failed?

- Training is not supplemented with loans and not targeted appropriately
- Weak management, complex structures and inadequate funding hinder success
- The problem is largely structural and therefore needs structural solutions
- The management and administrative oversight of the programs has been weak and sometimes problematic.

Suggestions

- Tertiary institutions in collaboration with the governments and labour market should plan their curriculum in line with what is needed for graduate performance in the workplaces and national development.
- Literacy in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) should be an integral part of the educational process and should be integrated into the curriculum at all levels of studies in tertiary institutions. The objective should be to empower Nigerian graduates with the information technology skills needed for performance in both the workplace and private life.
- Courses that are not marketable in the present-day labour market should be faced out in our tertiary institutions, while emphasise should be placed on marketable courses and this should be a function of national development expectation.
- Verbal and written communication should be introduced as a course and be made compulsory for all programmes in our tertiary institutions and extend to the world labour market.
- Our tertiary institutions should be properly funded towards providing required facilities so that graduates would be sufficiently equipped with appropriate knowledge, skills and attitude for effective participation in a very competitive global society.
- A more robust and proactive measures should be taken by the government to salvage the deteriorating standard of Nigerian Universities education. Investment in higher education must be a priority for the next decades if Nigeria is to be a country of knowledge that is highly creative and innovative.
- There is also a need for training and retraining of lecturers in all institution in Nigeria on modern way of teaching that will afford students the opportunity of acquiring knowledge and skills needed in the labour market.

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