1.0 Introduction

Several reasons account for the need to reconceptualise employability in higher institutions. The first is the crunch of unemployment which intersects with and could be partly responsible for the diminutive understanding of employability. The second is the weak, antiquated application of employability in higher education institutions which negatively affects graduates and their learning outcomes. Understanding employability requires a recognition of three subsets that would help in overcoming the limits of what it is to be a graduate in a highly evolving society. The subsets of employability are:

1. The student and the privileging of how knowledge is acquired and applied.
2. The institution and its potential for brokerage with social capital networks as well as quality assurance that especially prioritizes the scholarship and pedagogy of teaching and learning that will enable students make informed choices.
3. The Context comprising the mitigation of the complexity posed by political, economic and social factors that threaten the intended outcomes of graduates.

1.1 Analysing various interpretations of employability
Hillage and Pollard (1998) give employability a work-based definition which includes the necessary attributes they identified as employability skills. Building on this, the Higher Education Funding Council for England asserted that employment after 6 months of graduation is a measure for employability.

Knight and Yorke (2003) debunked this assertion because they felt it reflects more of the graduate labour market which is somewhat discriminatory to certain types of graduates. They concluded that employability is fostered when teachers are fully mindful of applicable curricular intentions.

Harvey (2005), drawing on Knight and Yorke’s point of view argued that emphasis should be less on ‘employ’ and more on ‘ability’. This ability, he contends, should be the critical reflective ability that empowers an individual. Employability, he alleges, becomes the “by-product of this enabling process” (Harvey, 2005 p.13).

Previously, Harvey (2002) identified three core processes that influence employability, and they are the:

- self-reflection by the student
- articulation of experiences and abilities
- pedagogic process that encourages development

He added that factors like subject discipline and bias recruitment practices can affect employability. Buttressing on this point, Mcquaid and Lindsay (2005) designed a framework on employability that demonstrates mediating factors such as individual characteristics and personal circumstances that actually prevent a person from getting a new job. They also identified discriminatory practices such as ‘area of residence, gender, ethnicity and age’ that could affect employment, even when the requisite skills and attributes are available.

In the midst of these multiplicity of definitions and attempts by these scholars to provide a broad definition of employability, some common threads stand out:

- Employability is linked to employment
- Attributes, skills and knowledge of graduates facilitate employability
- Individual characteristics, personal circumstances and other extraneous socio-economic factors are intervening variables that could act as multidimensional barriers to graduate employability

How do these definitions solve the problem of unemployment? From all indications, it seems that higher education is just there to serve the role of the economy because it equips students with a trade or profession. This utilitarian perspective is somewhat misaligned with quality in education. Ritzer (1993) in his book *McDonalization of Society* states that with a market view ascribed to higher education, a situation could arise where:

> “People would move from rationalized educational institutions to rationalized workplaces and from rationalized recreational settings to rationalized homes.” (Ritzer, 1993, p. 23.)”

### 1.2 The nature of employability

Employability encapsulates all that is done by an institution to obtain graduates that are ethical, innovative, productive and successful. Institutions need features that characterize them as ‘employable’ or as employability institutions. Considerations given to this concept will ensure the perception of employability as more of a process rather than a product.

In this digital age, extensive lecture methods that do not stimulate research or enable students to stretch their minds and scale up their thinking skills will simply not complement employability. We can begin to expect more employable graduates when teachers cultivate the habit of regularly developing their teaching/professional skills in a way that engages learners and leads to their flourishing.

The transformation of institutions is instrumental in ensuring that institutions become more entrepreneurial and mindful of social capital networks that may be used to proactively provide employment opportunities that enable students to gain expertise by undertaking job assignments which are capable of stretching their capabilities. The
purpose and emphasis should not necessarily be to gain employment after graduation but to innovatively create employment, thereby improving society and making every country more habitable. Then, instances of economic migration would be less about redundancy and more about cross-fertilisation by mutually benefiting knowledge-sharing partners.

Extracurricular activities such as career counselling services, Students’ Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES), short employment opportunities, and evidence of institutional links with applicable industries, have to be integrated in the university’s curriculum.

Beyond adverts and job fairs, extracurricular activities offered by institutions have a major role to play in the process of integrating employability in institutions. One way of doing this is to provide various interventions that will be gradually unveiled as each student progresses in an institution. For example, a counselling session offered at induction or matriculation will help students to decide whether or not they are on the right career path. A second level intervention may involve helping students to measure their employability level by encouraging them to set personal life goals which will obviously reflect on how their studies relate to the wider environment. A third level of intervention is institutional. Career services should be well-resourced within departments so that experiential learning can help to expand equitable opportunities for students to access work experience and employment. Career services must find ways to uplift the mind-sets of students from less privileged homes who have low self-esteem. In addition, such students should be linked with prospective employers as a way of tackling barriers to what could have been successful careers.

Employability is the long-term effect of university graduates who uphold the values of ethics in society, because they were nurtured that way. Rather than being one-sided, employability is wholly private and wholly public; a student equipped with employability skills influences his environment and changes the moral fabric of society. This assertion is in line with Newman’s vision on the purpose of a university. Newman (1852) contends that education is the formation of character which transmits something individual and something permanent; however, Newman also argues that the benefits are not restricted to the individual but diffuses to the civil society, thereby raising an ‘intellectual tone’. In addition, the benefits ‘cultivate the mind’, and ‘give enlargement and sobriety to the ideas of the age, and facilitate the exercise of political power, while bringing refinement to public life’

The curricula in institutions should be one which integrates ethical principles mentioned above by using an interdisciplinary approach. In addition, it should integrate or allow a balance between the practical and the theoretical, so that institutions become sites that enable the following:

a. Trade testing
b. Alignment between learners and their choice of study
c. Placements and career tracking services
d. Appropriate delivery of soft and hard skills (content, process, positive education, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, lateral thinking, problem solving, collaborative learning)
e. Measurement/evaluation of employability
f. Engagement at the level of employers, industry and professional bodies
g. Ground-breaking research
h. Cross-curricular tutoring
i. Relevance in the digital age

Brown and Hesketh’s research provide an example of how discriminatory selections operate within institution. They studied an organisation which received 14,000 applications for 428 vacancies; graduates from Oxford University had a one in eight chances of success, while applicants from new universities had a one in 235 chances (Brown and Hesketh, 2003). In this 21st century, people of a particular race or ethnic group continue to be discriminated in the labour market. The gender disparities between men and women which keeps women disadvantaged is not only premised on salary differentials between female and male. More discrimination is meted out to women who are not offered employment because of considerations such as pregnancy, motherhood and maternity leave which some employers believe would imply low productivity due to absence from work premises. Ageism is another factor blocking accessibility to career prospects and employments. In Africa where schooling is often delayed because of strikes and financial constraints, quite a number of graduates end up being too old to secure jobs because most openings are reserved for younger candidates and to make matters worse, the employers expect years of post-graduation experience!

Contrary to perceptions, these discriminatory practices are not entirely outside the control of institutions. Quality assured institutions have a role to play in addressing those factors that continue to amplify lack of employability.
This is why dialogue and brokering needs to be fostered with the industries and professional bodies so that the vulnerable and less privileged can have access to all the support and leverage they need for career success.

In relation to employment and other graduate prospects, discriminatory practices which remain largely unchanged, need to be addressed by Law. Equity in employment can be achieved if labour laws promulgated by the government are in place and regulated by qualified organisations. Where the Law exists, enforcement is needed to ensure that practice and higher education institutions can play a leading role in identifying misapplication.

Evidence-based employability is a requirement for both internal and external quality assurance agents who need to request evidence on the impact of employability activities as a way of fostering its internalisation by institutions.

If employability is about getting employed then who will create the new set of jobs that a fraction of future generations must secure? Graduates need to be nurtured and optimised through employability as they journey through an institution from induction till the completion stage. Otherwise, there will be even more chaos in society than is already recorded. Through employability, institutions will use linkages, the curriculum, pedagogy, resources and the strategic plans but these will not be substitutes for the action of being engaging mentors for each and every student. That way, students can identify the value of their ideas in a way that will ultimately benefit them and the common good.

The role of quality assurance in an employability institution will be to verify that students are supported and there is evidence to show through evaluation of tracer studies that such students are productive and successive graduates.

2 Methodology: Focus Group Discussion on the employability toolkit in Nigeria

The objective of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was to get some input from the end users (institutions and the regulatory body) as well as other subsets of the employability framework (students, industries, organisation, recruiting agencies and government) in Nigeria. The FGD was held in two states in Nigeria but the attendees who came from all over Nigeria included:

- Directors of Quality Assurance
- Directors of Academic Planning
- Members of the Governing Council
- Director from the National Universities Commission
- Recruitment Agencies
- Coaching organisation
- Lecturers
- Heads of Human Resources
- Oil and Gas Service Company
- Federal Ministry of Labour and Employment
- Head of Employability Trust Fund
- Student

The States of Nigeria represented were:

Lagos State (South West) Federal Capital Territory Abuja (Middle Belt)
Ogun State (South West) Rivers State (South-South)
Edo State (South West) Cross Rivers State (South South)
Oyo State (South West) Adamawa State (North East)
Kaduna (North Central)

There were 16 participants in Lagos and 9 in Abuja who were presented with an employability toolkit designed to capture the essence of employability. To gauge the usefulness of the employability tracking tool, the outcomes of the focus group discussion was subjected to a quantitative analysis through the use of descriptive analysis approach. In order to assess the consistency of the estimates of the same phenomenon, responses of two groups of discussants were gathered at Abuja and Lagos at different times. Measures such as frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations and charts were employed for analysis of their responses in order to determine the strength and importance of the employability tracking system for higher education institutions.
3.0 Results
The following section describes the findings of these two meetings in Lagos and Abuja.

Q1: Is it very important to implement such an employability tracking system in Nigerian Universities?

Findings from the analysis (figure 1) indicated that majority of the respondents strongly agreed on the importance of implementing this employability tracking system in Nigerian universities. Results showed that 55.6% and 87.5% of the respondents from the Abuja and Lagos groups respectively strongly agreed that it is important to implement an employability tracking system in Nigerian universities.

Q2: How satisfied are you with this tool based on the goals of employability journey mapping?

44.4% and 62.5% of the discussants from Abuja and Lagos respectively were very satisfied with the tool. Moreover, 55.6% and 37.5% of the discussants from Abuja and Lagos respectively were somewhat satisfied as indicated in figure 2.
Q3: How satisfied are you with each stage of the journey mapping based on the goals of employability tracking?

Results (Table 1) revealed that overall, discussants from Abuja and Lagos were somewhat satisfied and very satisfied respectively with stages of the journey mapping based on the goals of employability tracking. Specifically, discussants from Abuja were somewhat satisfied with stage 2 and stage 3 but very satisfied with stage 1 and stage 4/5. Similarly, discussants from Lagos were somewhat satisfied with stage 1 but very satisfied with the remaining stages of the employability tracking tool for the Nigerian universities.

Table 1: Assessing the level of satisfaction of the Journey mapping stages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Abuja FGD Information</th>
<th>Lagos FGD Information</th>
<th>Remark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean Response Rating (N=9)</td>
<td>Mean Response Rating(N=16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How satisfied are you with each stage of the journey mapping based on the goals of employability tracking?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 1</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>.527</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 2</td>
<td>4.44</td>
<td>.527</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 3</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>.500</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4/5</td>
<td>4.56</td>
<td>.527</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q4: Do the contents of the tool address employability tracking limitations at Nigerian higher education Institutions?

As regards the capability of the contents of the tool to address employability tracking limitations, results (figure 3) showed that 44.4% and 56.3% of the discussants from Abuja and Lagos respectively affirmed to the capability of the contents of the tool in addressing employability tracking limitations. Moreover, 44.4% and 43.8% of the discussants from Abuja and Lagos respectively were somewhat in the capability of contents of the tool in addressing employability tracking limitations at Nigerian education institutions.

Q5: How well did this tool express the intricacies of employability tracking limitations?

Findings from the study (figure 4) indicated that 55.6% and 62.5% of the discussants from Abuja and Lagos respectively were of the opinion that the tool can express the intricacies of employability tracking limitations very well. In the same vein, another 22.2% and 18.8% of the discussants also asserted that the tool can express the intricacies of employability tracking limitations extremely well.
Q5: What is your overall assessment of the tool?

Findings from the study (figure 5) revealed that overall, the tool was good as indicated by 44.4% and 75% of the discussants from Abuja and Lagos respectively. Furthermore, 22.2% and 12.5% of the discussants from Abuja and Lagos respectively asserted that the overall assessment of the tool was excellent.
4.0 EMPLOYABILITY JOURNEY MAPPING

This map has been developed to represent the initiatives to be taken during the journey of a student as he/she goes through university, from registration to graduation.

4.1 Oversight Departments:
- Academic and Career Counselling Centre
- Student Services
- School/Faculty of Business
- Alumni Association

4.2 Stage 1 – Year 1: Sensitization and Career Awareness
Institutions enlighten students about their career choice, ensuring that respective choices are well-aligned with strengths, abilities, interests and foreseeable prospects.

- Baseline surveys/questionnaires administered to new students on individual perception of academic and professional goals (can be done yearly or on entry, and once at the beginning of their final year. Whatever the frequency, these surveys/questionnaires can be worded to serve the same purpose).
- Categorized group counselling based on survey results – this can be file-free and conducted once a year, during survey/questionnaire administration.
- Surveys can also be modified into questionnaires administered to each student, and the results kept in their files. This administration can be done every year to help in assessing students’ academic and professional development goals. These questionnaires can also help students to make informed decisions about the employability track explained below.
- Website Blogs, Social Media Publicity and Visual Displays around Campuses comprise ways of creating and fostering career awareness.

5.3 Stage 2: Career Counselling, Intensified Career Awareness, Career Fostering

- Different groups of students at every class/year should undergo exercises capable of revealing the different factors that pose as threats to their academic and professional advancement after finishing school. Once identified, these threats should be countered through scholarships, intern placements, internal seminars, external conferences, etc.
- “Junior” career fairs should be organised, mostly for first internships.
- Partnerships should be formed with recruiting firms or providers of programs for different categories of students.
- Vocational trainings should be organised to increase the professional chances of students
- Surveys should be re-administered.
- Creating and incorporating an entrepreneurial /business/vocational/employability course track into the pedagogy of institutions for various disciplines is more than ever before, very necessary. This should happen in not only the business, arts and social sciences school, but also in the STEM faculties (especially
engineering and computer sciences due, to the increasing number of technology start-ups leading to a higher demand for e-commerce). Due to the differences in these disciplines, the content of the entrepreneurial track should be tailored to suit each discipline because what a student in the arts needs for employability may be different from what a student in the computer sciences needs for same.

- The pedagogy used in teaching at this stage must reflect 21st century skills comprising critical thinking and problem-solving skills, creativity and innovation skills, information and communication technology skills, and collaboration skills.
- Accomplished people in society should be invited to share their journeys and motivate students about respective career tracks.

5.4 Stage 3: Evaluation Drills:
- Practical Mentorship Programmes: At this stage, students should begin to enrol for mentorship by professors or successful and active alumni tasked with the goal of offering students hands-on internship during summer breaks. Provision should be made for effective, tailored mentoring for female students; peer-to-peer mentoring is also possible, and those students who mentor others are expected to be of proven character and academic attainment.
- Industrial Placements should be highly encouraged
- Students should be challenged with professional tasks like the development of business plans, as a way of measuring their capabilities.
- Business simulations should be carried out to promote practical learning.
- Cultivation of expected learning outcome including generic skills and subject-based skills that are functional and practical

Employability must have a strong focus on learning outcomes. Learning outcomes could be defined as statements of competencies that a student is expected to know and demonstrate. These statements are profiled and used to measure students’ competencies and capabilities. It is through the learning outcomes that a student is able to showcase their employability. Learning outcomes are often specific to the each subject discipline but some are generic and integral to all subjects across the curricula.

The generic learning outcome must include the following:
- Critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- Creativity and innovation skills
- Information and creative thinking skills
- Collaboration/Partnership and relationship skills
- Receptivity and adaptability
- Cognitive skills
- High emotional intelligence including self – awareness, self-mastery, managing one’s emotion, empathy and lateral thing
- Reflectiveness
- Ethics and the cultivation and practice of a deep sense of morality

The subject -based skills are those that can be found in the qualifications framework which sets out the different qualification levels and their corresponding standards of achievement. The qualifications framework provides the
context for outcomes developed through engagement between academic staff responsible for standards in institutions and respective employers in the field. There must be reference to current research in that field of study. Knowledge is constantly evolving and a reconceptualization of the curriculum even when it is prescribed or harmonised must be flexible enough to ensure that students remain up-to-date and relevant in their chosen career. This requires a correspondence between cognitive knowledge and pedagogical strategies of lecturers.

5.5 Stage 4/5- Career Support Pre/Post Graduation:

- Participation in an annual event designed by schools, with the ultimate objective of encouraging students to showcase their entrepreneurial skills and/or project proposals.
- Participation in a suitably modified version of “shark tank” – a programme where upcoming entrepreneurs get a chance to pitch their projects/business/start-up ideas on one hand, while already-established and successful entrepreneurs work on convincing investors to consider their business in exchange for shares.
- Schools should implement a mechanism for tracking the progress of student for a minimum of one year after graduation. Additionally, a means should be devised for evaluating the effectiveness of schools’ employability journey mapping.
- Students should be nurtured for ethical compliances
- Brokerage by the institutions
- Provision of Access to Grants, Loans, etc.
- Credit Management Orientations should be held
- Surveys should be re-administered.
- Completion of the employability/entrepreneurial track should entail finishing with a suitable final project to showcase and assess (written and practical entrepreneurial) skills attained so far in the academic setting.

6.0 Conclusion

The focus group discussions from Abuja

commended the toolkit as one that would help to align career choices with individual abilities, interests and prospects. The following recommendations were made:

- A mentoring system involving alumni was recommended as a way of supporting profiling achieved by comparing academic records with individual proclivities.

Clarity of Purpose/Practical Mentorship Programme would help students to prepare for work life, imbibe good work ethics, gain exposure to practical opportunities, and fine-tune their skills/abilities. Finally, there was a consensus that academia-industry linkage should be encouraged, entrepreneurship programmes should be incorporated into curricula, and appropriate government policies should be implemented through the NUC.
Employability Journey Mapping Model

Stage 1: Before Induction

Institutions enlighten students about career choices and align each student’s choice with ability, interests and foreseeable prospects.

Sensitization & Career Awareness

- Website Blog Posts, Social Media Publicity
- Baseline Survey & Profiling
- Categorized Group Counselling

Stage 2: After Induction

Once students come on board, it is important to let them know what they should focus on in relation to the career paths that they have chosen to follow.

Career Counselling, Intensified Career Awareness, Career Fostering

- The Course of Study/Pedagogy
- Employee or Entrepreneur?
- Available opportunities, Risk Anticipation

Stage 3: Penultimate Year

When the end of their university experience is at hand, then is the best time to evaluate how prepared they are for the employment phase of their lives.

Evaluation Drills

- Clarity of purpose
- Practical Mentorship Programme
- Development of Business Plan
- Business simulation
- Learning Outcomes: Generic and Subject based
- Survey re-administered
- The story so far: comparative/reflective study and measuring value added
- Employee or Entrepreneur?

Stage 4: Upon Graduation

Depending on student preferences, they should be linked with companies that can employ them or mentors to see them through entrepreneurship.

Career Support

- Eligibility
- Referrals, brokerage, grants, loans, credit management
- Tracer Studies
- Nurturing in Ethics
References


McQuaid, R., Green, A. and Danson, M and Danson, (2005). *The concept of employability*. Urban studies 42 (2) 197-219
