Mainstreaming Graduate Employability in Higher Education: The Role of ODL

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Outline

- The Concept
- Why Graduate Employability?
- Mainstreaming GE: Role of ODL
The Concept

• A set of achievements — skills, understandings, personal attributes for success in chosen career.
• An individual’s ability to gain and maintain initial employment,
  o Move between roles within the same organization,
  o obtain new employment, where necessary,
  o and/or generally secure suitable and sufficiently fulfilling work

employability means that institutions have supported the knowledge, skills, attributes, reflective disposition and identity that graduates need to succeed in the workforce
Two terms to note....

• **Skills** - additional qualities that a graduate needs to have in order to gain and maintain employment

• **Competencies** - the skills have to be demonstrable.
Factors to Consider

• **Social context** - (context-specific needs of different regions)

• **Social change** - influenced by emergence of new technologies and cultural advancement,
Why Graduate Employability
FOR OVERALL WELL-BEING AND STABILITY
HE PROVIDES PATHWAY FOR GREATER OPPORTUNITIES
WILL MY INVESTMENT PAY OFF?

EMERGING COMPLEXITIES IN THE WORLD OF WORK
SKILLS MISMATCH
As HE providers, we must pause to ask....

- Are learners fit for purpose?

- “Companies are constantly rethinking what they do and how they work, that’s why they need employees who can flex, stretch and evolve to meet the challenges we can’t yet imagine” (Agbu, 2022). Connecting quality assurance and employability for a future-ready workforce - Commonwealth of Learning (col.org)
Challenging Inequalities: Pathways to a Just World

Never before has inequality been so high on the agenda of policy-makers worldwide, or such a hot topic for social science research. More journal articles are being published on the topic of inequality and social justice today than ever before.

This is the Summary of the 2016 World Social Science Report. It draws on the insights of over 100 social scientists and other thought leaders from all over the world, across various disciplines, to emphasize transformative responses to inequality at all levels, from the grass-roots to global governance.
The Future of Job

• Forum’s Future of Job’s report suggests that employees in almost every part of the world will need to upgrade their skills and capabilities by 2025.
The problem

- Lack of coordination among key stakeholders
- Misconceptions and lack of knowledge about labour market needs
- Curriculum mismatch with labour market needs
- Outdated teaching methods and lack of practical training
- Lack of digital skills

wcms_857260.pdf (ilo.org)
Considering employability allows universities to:

- Strategically articulate the skills and experiences developed as a result of a higher education
- Devise ways to integrate useful and transferable skills and attributes throughout the students’ educational pathway
- Work collaboratively with diverse stakeholders to better understand the needs of the workforce, economy and community
- Demonstrate interest in their students’ long-term personal, professional and financial success
- Better understand how students’ coursework and experiences transfer into the workforce
Considering employability allows students to:

• Think about how their education can contribute to long-term success
• Acknowledge the importance of employability
• Engage in dynamic learning opportunities
• Acquire useful skills, competencies and attributes that are transferable and valued in the long term
• Visualise how their education may pay off
Considering employability allows Communities and Government Consider Employability to:

- Anticipate potential skills imbalance
- Engage with workforce that can adjust to dynamic changes
- Improve local development, economy and community engagement
Employability Skills

- Communication Skills
- Self-Motivation
- Numeracy
- Ability to work under pressure
- Adaptability
- Ability to articulate knowledge and skills
- Ability to learn
- Resilience and Growth mindset
- Transferable skills
- Willingness to try new things
- Interpersonal Skills
- Systems thinking
- Specialised or Discipline Specific knowledge
- Diverse experiences
- Interdisciplinary thinking
- Technical skills
- Ability to value diversity and differences
- Teamwork
Employability, Higher Education and Role of ODL
Right to Higher Education

• Africa has the lowest University enrolment rate, globally
• Global Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER): 19% in 2000 and 40% in 2020
• Ratio remain under 20% in Africa
• and 9.4% in Sub-Saharan Africa
• “Most people in Africa do not even know if they have the right to higher education, as rights and access to higher education are determined by many hard conditions,” Professor Olusola Oyewole, the secretary-general of the Association of African Universities

• Issues
  • Expanding access
  • Inclusion
  • Cost
  • Providing quality
ODL and Graduate Employability: The bigger Picture

Benefits of ODL

• Increasing access
• Supporting inclusion
• Enhancing Flexible learning opportunities
• Provides Life-long learning opportunities
• Reducing cost
Still on the bigger Picture

Low Carbon Footprint
Requirements for success in ODL

- Some level of digital skills
- Intrinsic motivation
- Self-directed learning skills
- Time-management strategy
- Ability to set goals for learning
- Collaboration
- Teamwork
The Specifics
MOOCs

- Reskilling and Upskilling
- Networking and collaboration
- Professional development
ODL promotes Self-Directed Learning
Policy-makers and social partners agree: the future lies in lifelong learning. Yet, the challenge is how to make this a reality and ensure that institutions, resources, motivation and time are available to enable people to acquire the right skills at the right time?

World Employment Confederation

Increased focus is placed on the combination of working and learning, especially for young workers entering the labour market for the first time. Another key element is to better identify the types of skills that people should anticipate learning. Policy initiatives are focusing on better connecting business to educators, promoting the development of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) skills, and enhancing ‘soft skills’ which encompass human interaction capabilities and the ability to learn.
ODL by its beauty and design supports GE

- Access
- Inclusivity
- Flexibility
- Life-long learning opportunities
- Cost effectiveness
- Healthy environment
- Quality courses
- Collaboration
- Internationalisation
Mainstreaming GE in HE: COL’s Model

Commonwealth countries are seeking new ways to improve access to quality higher education for all. The key challenges in this context include growing demand for higher education, limited resources and relevance to contemporary needs. Open universities, online and blended approaches are viable options for increasing access and equity, improving quality and cutting education costs. Governments and institutions need support to develop policies and strategies to transform the higher education sector and adopt open and distance learning (ODL), including online and dual-mode opportunities. Plus, educators need focused capacity building in ICT integration and the adoption of new pedagogies and authentic assessment. Furthermore, learners need a curriculum that prepares them for employment, entrepreneurship and sustainable jobs for the future.

Commonwealth of Learning (COL) is working with policymakers and higher education institutions to enhance quality education opportunities in the Commonwealth with a focus on Africa.
COL’s Employability Model:
Integrating employability in Higher Education Institutions

A Guide to Integrating Employability in Higher Education Institutions: The Commonwealth of Learning’s Employability Model (col.org)
COL’S Employability Model for higher education institutions
STAGE 1 YEAR 1
Sensitisation and Career Awareness

STAGE 2 YEAR 2
Career Counselling, Intensified Career Awareness & Career Fostering

STAGE 3 YEAR 3
Evaluation Drills

STAGE 4 YEAR 4
Career Support Pre & Post Graduation

Institutional Employability Scoring
0–49%, 0–38 points = Not Met/Poor
50–69%, 39–54 points = Partially Met/Average to Good
70–100%, 55–79 points = Fully Met/Very Good to Excellent

Criterion: 4
Total Possible Score: 12

Criterion: 8
Total Possible Score: 24

Criterion: 6
Total Possible Score: 22

Criterion: 7
Total Possible Score: 21

Total Cumulative Score Possible: 79
Employability Journey Mapping Model

**STAGE 1: Before Induction**

Institutions enlighten students about career choices and align students' choice with their abilities, interests, and foreseeable prospects.

**Sensitisation & Career Awareness**

- Website Blog Posts, Social Media Publicity
- Baseline Survey & Profiling
- Categorised Group Counselling
- Career Counselling, Intensified Career Awareness, Career Posturing
  - The Course of Study/Pedagogy
  - Employee or Entrepreneur?
  - Available Opportunities, Risk Anticipation

**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 they have chosen to follow.

**STAGE 3: Penultimate Year**

When the end of their university experience is at hand, it 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
- Survey Re-administered
- The Story So Far: Comparative/Reflective Study and Measuring Value Added
- Employee or Entrepreneur?

**STAGE 4: Upon Graduation**

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

- Eligibility
- Referrals, Brokering, Grants, Loans, Credit Management
- Tracer Studies
- Nurturing in Ethics
Getting Started: Pre-planning meeting
Generating employability and institutional review questions and expected outcomes

Phase 1: Determining Your Strategic Position
Step 1: Identify your employability strategic issues
Step 2: Conduct an environmental scan
Step 3: Identify institutional opportunities and threats

Phase 2: Developing Strategy
Step 1: Alignment to the university’s mission
Step 2: Alignment to the university’s values
Step 3: Alignment to the university’s vision statement

Phase 3: Developing Your Strategic Plan
Step 1: Set priorities
Step 2: Define long-term strategic objectives
Step 3: Set university-wide employability goals and measures
Step 4: Select key performance indicators
Step 5: Cascade your strategies to operations

Phase 4: Executing Your Strategy and Managing Performance
Step 1: Establish implementation schedule
Step 2: Train your team to manage their part of the plan
Step 3: Review progress quarterly
Strategic Objectives: An Example

- Embed employability in all degree courses in styles most relevant to each disciple
- Establish placement offices to facilitate students’ work experiences
- Link students to workplace as part of their training
- Forge strong collaborative linkages with industry and professional bodies and involve them in curriculum design
- Align employability framework with other relevant university policies
# Opportunities for developing employability skills in university

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<tr>
<th>CURRICULUM &amp; DESIGN</th>
<th>EXTRA- &amp; CO-CURRICULAR</th>
<th>CAREER PREP &amp; SUPPORT</th>
<th>EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING</th>
<th>PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</th>
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| Employability attributes, skills and opportunities can be built into courses  
  - Project-based  
  - Collaborative  
  - Opportunities for failure  
  - Critical self-reflection  
  - Multimodal  
  - Interactive  
  - Intergenerational learning | Campuses can organise conferences, competitions and experiences that enhance employability  
  - Case competitions  
  - Conferences  
  - Speaker workshops  
  - Study abroad  
  - Service & volunteering  
  - Student clubs  
  - Special training | Universities can help students understand what is needed to succeed in their chosen career  
  - Personalised career counselling  
  - Career awareness  
  - Help with resumes, interviews and cover letters  
  - Employment fairs  
  - Mentorship  
  - Internships | Students can be provided opportunities to try out skills in the real world, alongside members of the community who serve as co-educators  
  - Project-based partnerships with local businesses, non-profits or communities  
  - Course-based experiential learning co-led by community partners  
  - Co-op or work–learn opportunities | Students can be given opportunities to develop key personal attributes and skills such as resilience, confidence, flexibility, innovation, networking and public speaking  
  - Resources for counselling and personal development  
  - Opportunities for self-reflection  
  - Opportunities to learn from failure |
Toolkit for Key Employability Indicators for National Qualification Agencies (col.org)

Key employability standards for QA
• Institutional strategy
• Admission
• Programme design
• Teaching and Learning
• Student engagement
• Digital learning environment
• Assessment
• Student support
• Work integrated Learning
• Internationalization
• Research

TOOLKIT FOR KEY EMPLOYABILITY INDICATORS FOR NATIONAL QUALIFICATION AGENCIES

March 2020
Concluding thoughts....

• Many jobs are disappearing just as new ones are created.
• HEIs must be ready to address the skills and capabilities gaps, as well as help graduates meet the new requirements of a future-ready workforce.
• Innovative and strategic use of ODL enhances the mainstreaming of Graduate Employability in Higher Education
Thank you