

ASSESSING UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' SKILL ACQUISITION FOR EMPLOYABILITY IN CROSS RIVER STATE

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ABSTRACT: *This study assessed the level of university students' skill acquisition for employability in Cross River State. Two hypotheses were isolated to give direction to the investigation. Research survey design was adopted for the study. The sample size of 300 students were drawn from a population of 2,998 final year students from the two universities using stratified random sampling technique. Data collection was carried out with researchers constructed instrument titled "University Students' Skill Acquisition for Employability Questionnaire (USSAEQ)". Population t-test of one sample mean and independent t-test statistical techniques were used to analyzed the data collected through the instrument. Results obtained showed that the level of university students skill acquisition for employability is significantly low. Conventional university students do not differ significantly from those in specialized university in their skill acquisition for employability. It was concluded that university students' skill acquisition for employment is significantly low. Recommendations were made that university students in Cross River State should be equipped with sufficient employability skills.*

KEYWORDS: University, Skill Acquisition, Students' Employability

INTRODUCTION

Universities all over the world have the mission of producing skilled manpower necessary to function effectively in their societies. As a result, their training programmes are tailored towards achieving this mandate. The ability to achieve this mandate successfully is what distinguished one university from the other. It is on these bases that these universities are ranked. Those who can meet up this mandate successfully and effectively are ranked higher than others. In essence meeting this mandate involves impacting requisite skills, knowledge, attitude, to enable students to realize their potential and become self reliance one of the major goals of tertiary education in National Policy of Education of Federal Republic of Nigeria. (FRN 2013) is that students will acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society. This goal is yet to be achieved and is confirmed by Musari (2009), that about 4.5 million youths enter the labour market every year without any hope of getting employment for life sustenance.

However, the products of Universities in this 21st century appear to be skill deficiency, that is they lack basic skills such as entrepreneurship, skills communication skills, personal management skills, team work skills, computer literacy skill, leadership skills among others. Thus, they lack of what it takes to provide employment for themselves and others. This has given rise to producing students who are more of job seekers and dependence on others for survival. The result of this type of education (training) has been high level of unemployment.

It increases every year because of the number of graduates that enters the labour market and unemployment rate has increase from 21 percent in 2010 to 24 percent in 2011 (Muslim, 2013).

Therefore follows that universities have not been living up to expectation in solving the problems of life by equipping students with employability skills. Jakpa (2013) states that our educational system does not train our youth to acquire skills that will make them the needs of the society. As a follow up unemployed youths have constituents societal nuisance by indulging in act capable of undermining the well being of the society. Giving this unemployment problem, it has become necessary for students to be equipped with skills necessary for their individual survival and employability. In essence the major cause of unemployment among the university graduates is lack of skills to back up what they learnt in the universities.

Mike (2014) asserts that skill acquisition is the ability to be trained on a particular task or function. A skill is the learned ability to carry out a task with pre-determined results often within a given amount of time, energy or both. Skills can be divided into two namely: domain-general skills and domain-specific skills. For example, in the domain of work some general skills would include time management teamwork and leadership, self motivation and others while domain-specific skills would be useful only for a certain job (Cowan 2012).

Equipping students with different skills in the university will help them to be self-reliant, relevant and functional members of the society whether employed by government or self employed. Business Dictionary (n.d) defines skills as an ability and capacity acquired through deliberate, systematic and sustained effort to smoothly and adaptively carryout complex activities or job functions involving ideas (cognitive skills) thing (technical skills) and or people (interpersonal skills) students' skill acquisition is a powerful tool that can solve the problem of unemployment, meet individual and societal needs. Mike (2014) emphasized that the importance of skill acquisition includes self employment, diverse job opportunities, employment generation, effective function and crime reduction. Equipping university students with different skills is means of taken corrective measures for the high level of unemployment because without skill acquisition the national goals cannot be realized hence corruption and violence will be on increase.

Employability in this context is getting job, staying and progressing in the job. Hillage (1998) says that employability refers to a person's capability for gaining and maintaining employment. For individual, employability depends on the knowledge, skills and abilities they posses in addition to the way they present those assets to employers. It is against this back drop that this study intends to assess the level of university student's skill acquisition for employability with regards to entrepreneurship skills, interpersonal skills, team work skills, personal management skills, computer/technical literacy skills and leadership/management skills

LITERATURE REVIEW

Some empirical studies were reviewed on the indices of employability skill acquisition. Omar, Bakar and Rashid (2012) researched on employability skill acquisition among Malaysian community College students. The sample size was 325 students selected randomly. Employability skills were measured using an instrument developed by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS). Data were statistically analyzed with mean and standard deviation and the result revealed that the employability skills of community

college students was moderately high. They also tested whether employability skills among students differed as a function of gender and work experience using independent t-test. The result showed that there was no significant difference in employability skills by gender or work experience.

Bruce (2014) in his study on skills required by graduates. He tested the most important skills to develop in employees to drive organizations growth. The rating scale showed leadership skill 62% management skill 62% interpersonal skill 53% innovation and creativity 45%, resilience 43%, technical skills 40%, sale/marketing skills 32%, client management 24% and other/none of the above 4%.

Uchendu, Osim and Odigwe (2013) researched on managing entrepreneurship education for economic security in universities in Cross River State. Two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Ex-post facto design was adopted for the study. The population was made up of all the core and general managers from the two universities. Data were collected and analyzed with Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis and independent t-test statistical technique at 0.05 level of significant. Result revealed that management of entrepreneurship education has a significant relationship with economic security.

Statement of the problem

University students are observed to be deficient in basic skills such as; entrepreneurship skills, interpersonal skills, teamwork skills, personal/management skills, computer/technical literacy skills, and leadership/management skills among others. They tend to develop the cognitive domain to the detriment of psychomotor domain and effective domain. Thus we have students who are sound in knowledge but lack capacity for utilizing practical skills to solve problem. As such, students are involved more in memorization of concept, this has made them to be found wanting in performing practical oriented jobs. This has given rise to large number of unemployment youths who come into the labour market on yearly basis looking for white Collar jobs that in most cases are not in existence. Universities on their part have tried to bridge this deficiency gap by reviewing their curricular and tilting towards practical oriented courses. In spite of this attempt not much has been achieved as high numbers of unemployment graduates have remained unabated. It is on these bases that the problem of this study is stated thus: what is the level of the university students' skill acquisition for employability.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to find out the level of university students' skill acquisition for employability. Specifically, it was also to ascertain whether university students' skill acquisition for employment is influenced by the university type.

Hypotheses

1. University students' skill acquisition for employability is not significantly low.
2. Conventional university students do not differ significantly from those in specialized university in their skill acquisition for employability

METHODOLOGY

This study investigated the assessment of university students' skill acquisition for employability in Cross River State. Survey research design was adopted for the study. The study area in Cross River State of Nigeria. The state is one of the six states that made up the South-South geopolitical region of Nigeria. It is one of the oil producing states with political and economic capital in Calabar.

The study was focused on two universities in the state, conventional and specialized. The population was made up of 2,998 final year students in the faculties of education. With stratified random sampling technique, 300 students were selected to constitute the sample size. Data collection was carried out researchers constructed instrument titled "University Students' Skill Acquisition for Employability Questionnaire (USSAEQ)" It was made up of two sections namely: A and B. section A contained information on six demographic variables like the name of institution, the university type, sex. Section B contained 24 items arranged on five-point rating scale. 4 items measured which are as follows: Entrepreneurship skills, interpersonal skills, team work skill, personal management skills, computer/technical literacy and leadership/management skill.

The instrument was validated by experts in measurement and evaluation. The reliability was established using Cronbach Alpha method. Thirty (30) copies of the instrument were administered to students who do not constitute part of the sample size. Scores obtained were analyzed with Cronbach Alpha Method which gave coefficients ranging from 0,79 to 84, which confirmed that the instrument was reliable and consistent in achieving the objectives of the study.

Data collection was carried out by the researcher. 300 copies of the instrument were administered to the sampled students in the two universities. The questionnaire were all retrieved from the subjects, this measure yielded a 100 percent return rate. Data collected were analyzed statistically with population t-test of one sample mean and independent t-test statistical analysis. All the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Hypothesis one states that university students' skill acquisition for employability is not significantly low. The only variable in this hypothesis is university student's skill acquisition for employability. Population t-test of one sample mean was used to analyze data obtained. Summary of the result were presented in table 1.

TABLE 1: Population t-test of one sample Mean statistical analysis of university students' skill acquisition for employment

N=300

Variables	Observed Mean X	Assumed Mean μ	SD	t	Critical t-value
Entrepreneurship skill	20.06	24.00	8.68	62.40	
Interpersonal skill	20.04	24.00	9.04	58.60	
Teamwork skill	19.48	24.00	8.36	40.38	
Personal management skill	18.56	24.00	7.84	46.30	1.968
Computer/technical literacy skill	20.42	24.00	6.46	56.42	
Leadership management skill	28.28	24.00	8.84	49.36	

Significant at 0.05, df = 299, critical t- value = 1.968

Result presented in table 1 revealed that the calculated t-values were higher than the critical t-value of 1.968 at 0.05 level of significance and 299 degree of freedom in respect of entrepreneurship skill ($t=62.40$, $P<0.05$), interpersonal skill ($t=40.30$, $p<0.5$) personal management skill ($t=46.30$, $P<0.5$) computer/technical literacy skill ($t=56.42$, $P<0.5$) and leadership/management skill ($t=49.38$, $p<0.5$). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This implies that the level of university students' skill acquisition for employability is significantly low.

Hypothesis two states that conventional university students do not differ significantly from those in specialized university in their skill acquisition for employability. The independent variable is nature of university, while the dependent variable is skill acquisition for employability.

TABLE 2: Independent t-test statistical analysis of the difference between conventional university students and their specialized university counterparts in their skill acquisition for employability

Variables	Conventional X	N=150 SD	Specialized X	N=150 SD	t
Entrepreneurship skill	18.43	9.36	18.48	8.38	-0.462
Interpersonal skill	18.54	8.44	18.42	9.32	-0.212
Teamwork skill	18.42	10.42	17.68	7.56	-0.342
Personal management skill	17.56	9.38	18.56	8.44	-0.246
Computer/technical literacy skill	18.82	8.54	17.48	9.48	-0.264
Leadership management skill	17.66	8.38	18.44	9.46	-0.352

Not Significant at 0.05, df = 298, critical t- value = 1.968

Result presented in table 2 indicated that the calculated t-values were lower than the critical t-value of 1.968 at 0.05 level of significance and 298 degree of freedom in respect of entrepreneurship skill ($t = -0.462$, $P < 0.5$), interpersonal skill ($t = -0.212$, $p > 0.5$) teamwork skill ($t = -0.342$, $P > 0.5$) personal management skill ($t = -0.246$, $P > 0.5$), computer/technical literacy skill ($t = -0.264$), leadership/management skill ($t = -0.352$, $P > 0.5$) with this result, the null hypothesis was not rejected. This implies that conventional university students do not differ from their specialized university counterparts in their skill acquisition for employability.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results of hypothesis one revealed that the level of university students' skill acquisition for employability is significantly low. This necessitated the rejection of the null hypothesis and upholding the alternate one. This findings means that the level of university students' skill acquisition for employability is significantly low, meaning that the skills are not sufficient to make them functional, relevant and self-reliant. In order words the skills acquired by the students cannot guarantee employment both formally and informally. As university students when they graduate, they will join the group of employed in the society thereby increasing the rate of corruption and violence. This study is the opposite of Omar, Barker and Rashid (2012) who discovered that employability skill acquisition in Malaysian was moderately high.

The finding is not surprising because the issue of equipping university students with employability skills has not created an impact on employment. This might be explained that universities mired in problems such as poor funding, poor learning environment, poor staff motivation and poor physical facilities. All these combined together to prevent universities from realizing their goals and objectives. Hence this finding is not surprising, it therefore means that universities have been programmed by the above mentioned problems to record little success in tackling employability problems.

The result of hypothesis two states that conventional universities students do not differ from their specialized university counterparts in their skill acquisition for employability. This finding suggests that students from conventional universities are not different from their counterparts in specialized university in their skill acquisition for employability. Ordinarily one would have expected specialized universities to have the upper hand. This is because their programme has specific focus in areas that promote skill acquisition such as engineering, accounting, marketing among others. The no significant different recorded between conventional and specialized universities signifies that specialized universities are yet to make their impact felt societally.

Thus they exist only in make whereas their functioning and organization of their programmes are the same. Undoubtedly, the specialized universities are established principally to solve skill related problems, but more often than not they have delved into liberal arts and social sciences which are suppose to be exclusive preserve of conventional universities. So the specialized universities delving into academic programme means that they have shifted their mandate. It could not be explain why specialized universities should be offering courses like law whereas other skill oriented courses e.g. vocational and technical courses have been relegated to the background.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the findings, it was concluded that the level of university skill acquisition for employability in Cross River State is significantly low. In essence more skills are needed to enable the university graduates to create job for themselves and others. It was also concluded that conventional university students do not differ from their counterparts in specialized university in their skill acquisition for employability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the finding, the following recommendations were articulated.

1. University management in Cross River State both conventional and specialized should equip students with more employability skills right from their first year to the final year with practical's.
2. Priority should be accorded to course like entrepreneurship education, leadership/management, computer/technical literacy programmes among others. There is need to provide enough facilities for each centre for practical's.

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