

Managing University Education for Employability in Nigeria: The Way Forward

Ossai, Anthony Great (PhD) and Okokoyo, Isabella Ezinwa (PhD)
Faculty of Education, University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State

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ABSTRACT: *The study investigates the concerning issue of unemployment among Nigerian graduates in recent years. Youth unemployment has come from the University's incapacity to meet the needs of these graduates, as well as the promotion of economic, self-reliance, and self-sufficiency. In Nigeria, this has led in a rise in youth unrest. In addition, the purpose of this study is to investigate employability, with a focus on the relationship between education and employability, in order to evaluate whether employability can be improved through university education. The article goes on to highlight some employability skills and propose ways for universities to re-engineer themselves in order to obtain these capabilities for the benefit of our students and society as a whole.*

KEY WORDS: graduates, employability, university, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Education is the instrument of excellence for satisfying the requirements of society and overcoming its challenges. The education industry's primary function in an economy is to create the various types of workforce required by the economy. As a result, the basic, secondary, and postsecondary levels of education have been assigned different tasks in terms of manpower generation for the nation's economy. The two broad goals of secondary education are to prepare individuals for useful living within society and to prepare for higher education. While primary school lays the foundation for the other levels, secondary education has two broad goals (FGN 2004). Tertiary education, on the other hand, is the education provided after secondary school in universities, colleges of education, and other educational institutions.

Universities are formed for the purpose of producing manpower, and they hold a historic significance in every community. The university may not only acquire goods from the preceding ties, but it is also the final stop for formal teaching and learning before entering the workforce. The university is anticipated to play a critical role in supporting long-term economic, social, and cultural growth (Bassey & Bassey 2011).

A university is a higher institution that serves a certain role in most countries across the world. Universities exist in Nigeria to pursue various basic and secondary objectives. The primary mission is to prepare people to get degrees, with community service as a secondary goal. The university must be uncompromising in order for any nation to be economically vibrant, politically stable, and culturally appreciable and marketable. Producing skilled graduates for this country's productive vibrancy in all fields of economic activities is our obligation.

The extant literature on education management in Nigeria, on the other hand, is rich with examples of how Nigerian education has fallen short of expectations. It has failed to develop employable, productive, and self-sufficient skilled manpower (Babalola, 2007). Even in courses that require specific equipment, workshops, and instruments, students are trained in theoretical teaching and learning scenarios. Large class sizes, insufficiently qualified teachers, a lack of instructional materials, old and dilapidated school buildings with leaking roofs, insufficient class rooms and staff offices, ill-equipped science laboratories, poorly equipped engineering workshops, insufficient staff development, examination malpractice, and unmotivated workforces characterize Nigeria's educational system (Hartnett, 2000). That may explain why Nigeria's weak educational system is partly to blame for a lack of appropriate skills and, as a result, a high percentage of unemployment among graduates in the country.

University education is meant to instill in the recipients particular characteristics, such as the ability to do certain activities autonomously. These characteristics give individuals a sense of self-assurance and independence.

Employability refers to one's ability to find and sustain satisfying work. Because of the rise in short-term contracts, part-time work, our sourcing, and home-working, graduates must be more adaptable to the increasing number of career changes they will encounter during their lives (Harvey 2000). In truth, employability refers to a person's capacity to keep a job and advance in their career. The job market has become increasingly competitive as a result of globalization and the implementation of the Employment Equity Act of 1998. As a result, a person must compete for a job not just with people in his or her own town or country, but also with those who emigrate from other countries. As a result, the goal of this article is to look at employability and the relationship between education and employability in order to figure out how to go forward in a competitive world.

THEORITICAL CONTEXT

The Human Capital Theory (HCT) is used in this work, which was developed by Theodore Schultz in his 1960 article on Capital Formation through Education (Holden & Diddle 2016). Schultz believed that education, both in terms of quality and quantity, is critical to a society's economic growth and progress. To accomplish economic development, high-quality education is

essential. Education, according to the Human Capital Theory, is vitally important and necessary for advancing a people's productive capabilities. The Human Capital Theory emphasizes how high-quality education can improve the labour force's productivity by enhancing their capacities. According to Cohen and Solo (2007), providing formal education is viewed as an investment in Human Capital, which proponents of the idea believe is more valuable than physical capital. This assumption is reasonable because the main driver of higher education demand is the expectation of higher earnings during a person's lifetime, and higher earnings are required to offset the high expenditures of higher education (Boeteng and Ofori-Sarpony, 2002).

Given the current challenges of high graduate unemployment, poverty, societal problems, rising dependency ratios, rising recruitment expenses, and delinquent behavior, the Human Capital Theory's hopes have become a phantom for the majority of graduates from developing nations like Nigeria (Pitan 2016). In actuality, Higher Education Institutions can only be called labour market ready and Human Capital Theory compatible if the graduates they generate have both core knowledge and skills that the labour market requires (Pitan, 2016). Higher Education Institutions should consider developing novel teaching pedagogies and providing a conducive learning environment that can support the teaching of employable skills in order to accomplish the goals of the Human Capital Theory (Tomlison, 2017). According to Yorke (2004), such creative teaching approaches should include active interaction and collaborations that use constructivist learning environment elements, as well as continuous curricular and pedagogical content review. All of this will help graduates compete and collaborate in a changing knowledge economy (Pitan, 2016).

Concept of Employability

Employability refers to one's ability to find work, hold it, and find new work if necessary. Employability, according to Fugate (2004), is a multi-dimensional term in which elements related to acquiring a job and those related to work preparedness must be differentiated. Employability, according to Yorke (2004), is a collection of accomplishments-skills, understanding, and personal characteristics that make graduates more likely to find job and succeed in their chosen fields, benefiting themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy. Employability refers to a graduate's ability to perform in a job and move between occupations, allowing them to remain employable throughout their lives.

Being employed and being employable are not the same thing; being employed implies having a job, whereas being employable involves having the qualities necessary to keep a job and advance in it. As a result, employability in higher education is about generating graduates who are capable and able, and this has an impact on all aspects of university life, including academic program delivery and extracurricular activities. Because of the rise in short-term contracts, part-time work, outsourcing, and home-working, graduates must be more adaptable to the increasing number of professional changes they will encounter during their lives (Harvey 2000)

Similarly, Harney and Morey (2003) emphasized the abilities that graduates will need to manage their own careers as well as those that will allow them to continue learning throughout their careers. Communication, numeracy, information, technology, and learning how to learn at a higher level are among these talents. Literacy, problem-solving abilities, team-working skills, and a grasp of the world of work, which refers to knowledge about how organizations run, what their aims are, and how people in the organization accomplish their tasks, are all general skills needed to improve graduates' employability (Coopers and Lybrand, 1998).

Graduate Employability in the Nigerian Context

Graduate employability, according to Oluyomibo (2016), is a global issue that has gotten scholarly attention as a result of the global crisis and a dramatic increase in the emigration of tertiary educated young people seeking additional education and jobs overseas. This suggests that concerns connected to graduate employability are given a lot of weight in the developing world, particularly in Nigeria, where there is a skills gap (Oladokun & Olaleye, 2018). Evidence abounds in Nigeria that a high rate of graduate unemployment exists, which is not due to a lack of jobs, but rather to a lack of employable skills that the labour market requires, as well as a skill gap and mismatch (Oladokun & Gbadegesia, 2017).

Emen, Nwanguma, and Abaroh (2012) revealed that 23 million of Nigeria's 40 million unemployed youths were unemployed due to a lack of employable skills, with the majority being university graduates. In support of this assertion, Sodipo (2014) asserted that the Central Bank of Nigeria stated that over 70% of unemployed Nigerian youngsters lack the skills necessary by labour markets, with the majority being university graduates. Furthermore, many businesses have expressed major concerns about their employees' abilities (Akanmu, 2011). Communication, information technology, decision-making, critical thinking, interpersonal relationships, technical and numerical skills are only a few of the employable skills that Nigerian university graduates lack. As a result, policymakers in higher education should ensure that the thousands of graduates generated each year in Nigerian colleges have both technical and generic skills necessary by today's industry and labour market.

Employability and Educational Acquisition

The intellectual aptitude of an employee might be considered an asset in our industry. This asset can be used to generate and sell products and services. The greater the number of highly educated individuals, the more a company may theoretically generate. The availability of individuals with the necessary knowledge and skills is a critical factor in determining both corporate and economic growth. Economies that have a significant supply of skilled workers, as a result of schooling and training, are frequently able to leverage on this by developing higher-value-added businesses like high-tech manufacturing.

Between higher education institutions and companies, there is a lack of a shared language of competencies (Dunne, 2000). Part of the problem with university education's skills agenda and initiatives is the idea that skills have the same significance in education as they do in the workplace (Holmes, 2001). This isn't correct. The participation of companies in converting employability into graduate employment complicates the interaction between the higher education institute's employability development initiatives and graduate employment (Harvey, 2001).

Clearly, the qualities of a graduate are more essential than the subject studied or the degree earned (Harvey, 2001). Employers value graduates' ability to handle difficult knowledge and transmit it effectively more than their degree or courses studied (Knight and Yorke, 2000). Rather than specialized studies and knowledge, graduate employers seek a mix of older skills, personal and intellectual traits. Employers seek graduates with self-theories characterised by confidence, optimism, and a belief in their ability to make a difference.

Employers are increasingly looking for graduates who can adapt to the workplace culture, use their strengths and skills to help the company grow, and participate in innovative teamwork (Little, 2001). According to Morley (2001), the notion of employability needs to be established in order to balance out the power dynamics that exist in the recruitment and retention discussion of employability. This suggests that employers should be included in the educational process so that they are more sensitive to concerns of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. As a result, one is compelled to inquire as to why there is such a disparity between what is supposed to be the objective of education and the reality on the ground. One of the causes for the scarcity of necessary employment skills among Nigerian graduates, according to Smith (2001), is the curriculum employed in national educational institutions. The curriculum has become obsolete and is no longer applicable. Edukugho (2012) agrees, stating that "our university curriculum appeared to be more content focused than outcome driven, which should be altered." This suggests that Nigeria is pursuing its educational goals with the wrong tools.

In a study to determine the relationship between graduate turnout and graduate unemployment in Nigeria, Akinyemi, Ofem, and Ikuenomore (2013) found that while the number of graduates produced by tertiary institutions continues to increase, the number of graduates who are employable remains low. The survey also attempted to learn about Nigerian employers' perceptions of current Nigerian graduates' employability, both in the private and public sectors, and concluded that companies believe Nigerian graduates are underprepared for the job market as a result of their schooling. The brain drain, according to the researchers, is to blame. It is their responsibility. belief that the greatest minds are continually flocking to western countries where they are valued more. This explains the inadequacy of university professors, the majority of whom are new and inexperienced, as well as products of the same flawed system.

The problem of infrastructural shortage in Nigerian postsecondary institutions is arguably the most significant factor preventing Nigerian students from acquiring the necessary skills. This has been attributed to a lack of proper education financing. Nigeria is clearly falling short of UNESCO's education funding target of 26% of national budget. According to Kakwagh (2014), the education sector received 6.45 percent, 5.4 percent, 10.13 percent, 8.43 percent, and 8.67 percent of total spending in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, and 2013. With such a small amount of funds, institutions will struggle to construct the necessary infrastructures to assure the acquisition of skills needed in the workplace. It is a reality that appropriate financial input is required for the success of any educational system because the provision of facilities and equipment, as well as the buying of materials and other necessities, is contingent on the availability of funds. A situation in which students studying to be scientists, for example, do not have access to a laboratory where they may conduct tests is unappealing. In some circumstances, where laboratories exist, they are so old that they are no longer connected to what is going on in society.

Evaluation Strategies For Graduate Employability

To promote the smooth development of university education in Nigeria, the government, in collaboration with the National University Commission, should take the following steps:

Curriculum Revision: The National University Commission should make sure that curriculum is reviewed on a regular basis. Because society dictates the aims that education follows, frequent curriculum reviews should reflect the quantitative and qualitative yearnings and aspirations of this society from time to time (Fafunwa, 2004). In order to be relevant, effective, and efficient, curriculum content should be more sensitive to societal requirements.

Discipline-Dedicated Universities: Most Nigerian universities' "jack-of-all-trade" nature is not conducive to attaining the goal of education as a change agent in Nigeria. While there should be no constraints on the types of courses that any university can provide, there should be the formation of discipline-specific colleges that can train the necessary people in specific technological and scientific sectors. In reality, appropriate education repositioning is a solid bet for poverty eradication, industrialization, and economic diversification.

Adequate Educational Facilities: The government and the National University Commission should ensure that every university has adequate educational facilities such as modern textbooks, mass media, gadgets, computers, laboratories, and workshops. Because the quality of graduates generated in universities cannot exceed the reach and research environment given in the system, the National University Commission, in partnership with the government and other key stakeholders, should redouble their efforts to improve educational facilities.

University Accreditation on a Regular and Effective Basis: The National University Commission shall ensure that high standards are maintained and sustained. In the accreditation of

departments, the NUC should incorporate a measure of university performance that includes graduates' labour market performance.

Labour Employer Involvement: Labour employers should be involved in the development, design, and delivery of courses. Commenting on the relevance of course content to future employment prospects, providing materials and ideas for students' projects, and presenting guest lectures are all examples of this. Employers serving as formal members of course advisory committees and university staff are two other examples.

Increased Funding: The National University Commission, in partnership with the Academic Staff Union of Universities, should guarantee that funds are allocated in accordance with the UNESCO proposal of 26%. Failure to follow through on the advice clearly jeopardizes the country's efforts to achieve high-quality higher education.

CONCLUSION

In general, education is a smart way to avoid unemployment and stay employed during bad economic times. A tertiary degree is a plus in terms of employability, but it is not a guarantee of work. The substance of education and training is (in most cases) not aligned with workplace requirements, making it difficult for graduates to find work. The distance between the current educational system and the demands of the labour market is expanding. It is undeniable that if university graduates had all of the necessary skills to put them in a better position in the job market, the majority of the unemployed graduates would have found work. Particularly in the current economic context, good education and skills are vital. Although a university degree improves one's chances of finding work, it is necessary to focus more on the employability skills needed once one graduates.

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