

Awareness and Attributes of Employability Skill amongst Nigerian Graduates of Higher Education and the Enhancement of Initiatives

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the awareness and attribute of employability skill amongst Nigerian graduates. Every student of Higher Education is in school studying and expecting to graduate someday, and thereafter secure a job or establish a business. While some students try hard to build up initiatives after graduation, most are down helplessly as they keep searching for job without hope. Global prospects for employment has worsen, including Nigeria which has a population of about 200 million people. Even with the continuous progress made in funding institutions of higher learning and empowering the labour market, Nigerian university graduates have also submitted their dissatisfaction in regards to the high level of unemployment. On this note, what is required of the graduates or graduating students in securing employments? Why do employees seek for 3 to 5 years working experience knowing that fresh graduates does not possess that? Are the students' taught using newest technologies and equipment that can be seen in the competitive labour market? And how can employees and the universities enhance the student's talent. With these questions in mind, this paper reviews the findings in other previous literature and relate it to Nigerian graduates. Recently, low academic standard sees the university graduate as unqualified. As a result of this, most graduates find it difficult to secure employment relating to their field of study upon graduation. Therefore, this paper seek to analyse the aspect of the employability awareness thus investigating the employability skill of Nigerian university graduates. Although this study is based on casual interview with few employers of public enterprises, private organisations, some Nigerian graduate and undergraduate students, it explores the development of the 'employability' agenda in higher education. It also examines the nature and effect of organisational change for graduates by evaluating what attributes graduates will need in the next decade.

Keywords: *Employability Attributes, Skills, Nigerian university Graduates, Employability Awareness, Initiatives.*

I. Introduction

Like other developing countries, Nigeria is building a knowledge-based economy founded on a highly skilled workforce. Similarly, both public and private sectors are interested in graduate who has achieved some

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higher level of reasoning, better initiatives and a good decision maker than just graduates who are only skilful in solving academic problems.

In an effort to curb the rate of high unemployment in Nigeria, the Nigerian government on July 7th 2019 signed the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement. (AfCFTA) which comprises of about 53 countries in Africa. The aim of the (AFCFTA) according to the African Union is to create a single African market, to open up the borders for free movement of people, goods and services across, and to unite Africa. In the past, the Nigerian government had introduced a lot of programs that could help to curb unemployment. For example, in 2004, the federal government of Nigeria introduced the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP) which are all poverty reduction strategy and plan for reducing unemployment.

However, the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) stated in its Labour Force Statistics, released on Wednesday, December 19, 2018 that Nigeria's unemployment rate rose to 23.1% of the workforce by the end of September 2018, up from 18.1% in 2017. This reveals the high level of unemployment in Nigeria.

A casual interview was conducted on few graduating students and results were generated. Many of the graduates were in university for different reasons, to certain undergraduates who are still confused, they just wanted to be graduates, but some feels that without the university it is relatively difficult to get a better job or better earning power. Although some chooses a program because they really love the course they are studying they believe that it will advance their career and higher potential in future, some others still sees it as an opportunity to also make new friends and acquire more experience. Yes, the university could be a place to get all of that, but in 2010, 75% of the students who participated in the Sodexo University Lifestyle Survey said that they went to the university just to improve their job opportunities. Recently, due to the advancement in technology, acquiring just a university certificate does not guarantee one an employment. Graduate must possess employability skill. What then is employability skill?

It is important to understand employability skill. According to Robinson, (2000). Employability skills are those simple expertise required for knowing and or getting, storing and thriving on a job. Basically, simple Academic Skills, Critical Thinking Skills and Personal Qualities. However, for university students, initiative and skills are key priorities necessary for employability. Generally, being aware of a job criteria and attributes before searching for a career job makes a huge difference in graduate employability.

In the preceding literature, a lot of authors have tried to define employability in different perspectives and contexts (Rothwell & Arnold, 2007; Tymon, 2013; Yorke, 2006). The concept is described as complex, multi-dimensional and even vague, thus defying simple articulation and measurement (Andrews & Higson, 2008); Tymon, 2013). In government reports on graduate destinations, employability is commonly equated with employment, but preparation for employability does not end in academics alone, there is a need for the graduates to also learn additional skills as the development increases in every sector and this skills does not exempt other international language(s).

In Nigeria, the universities attached industrial placement as part of the perquisites for degree, yet more awareness and skills are needed to face the ever growing technological globe. Although some do not agree that some courses like social sciences and historian students should also have industrial placement, but Reece and

Walker (2016) noted that there are students whose learning abilities are better enhanced through direct or practical experiences. Nevertheless, there is need for graduates to increase their employability skill. The Nigerian universities can develop a kind of graduate employability programmes in line with the courses offered by the institution and also collaborate with the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), industries and organisation to work out modalities depending on different career.

Also, evaluation of these programmes can be carried out quarterly or twice annually as the development increases this will enable a strong connection between the employees and the universities of higher learning. Organising initiative programmes on employability awareness will help graduates develop skills in this modern economy before facing the labour market. Giving that the universities are doing their best in training students and for graduate to meet up with the rise in the skills needed to be employable, there ought to be an additional training other than the normal course work in the university. These includes the ability to practically work with others. (Team work) leadership skill, must be a critical thinker, must be able to handle multiple task and still be confident, and effective communication. For a graduate, it is important to develop all these attributes for employability.

The view of this paper is to review other literature and to establish action in enhancing the awareness of employability skill by expanding student's leadership role. As Slavin and Morrison (2013) argued that the leadership style displayed within the work environment can theoretically affect every employee's attitudes and behaviours when attached with poor leadership approaches from others at different management levels. The network between employees and the universities to ascertain the needed skills to prepare graduates even before graduation. It is the recommendation of this paper that more emphasis should be laid on behavioural attitude, ability to be multi-tasking, building strong graduates whose NYSC program are related to the field of study. Many organisation would prefer to employ graduates who possess these qualities in order to cut running and training cost. Graduates on their own, should try and learn other international language, establish a network between the alumina who are presently employer or employees. These could be an advantage depending on the kind of job they are seeking. Similarly, governments should provide the necessary funding mechanism to reassure better investment in student's employability skill. Having carried out an broad research on employability skill, The University of Sheffield Learning and teaching Plan in 2016 states that "We want to ensure we equip our students effectively for their chosen path, recognising that employability is an important dimension to our education...". (Blyth and Cleminson, 2016, p.5). The University of Sheffield has in 2017 started the Support for developing employability and Careers Service and other institutions should make this common too.

II. Literature Review

To keep pace with global competition, fresh graduates need to adapt to the new business environment and workplace demands. The key element to enable graduates to keep up with these demands seems to be the employability skills and traits that are imparted during tertiary education. It has also become a common belief in industry that higher education institutions should equip graduates with the proper skills necessary to achieve

success in the workplace (Robinson & Garton, 2007). However, based on the continuous rapid technological development, it is necessary for the students and graduates to have additional skills needed for employability.

Statement of the problem

Amidst the rise in student's enrolment into Nigerian institutions of higher learning, there is a high level of unemployment among Nigerian graduates of the institutions, especially the polytechnics and universities and this calls for quantitative assessment to determine solution to the problem. Osuala, (2004), noted in his research that graduates of higher education institutes and secondary schools' leavers in Nigeria are becoming more and more unemployed due to lack saleable skills for self-reliance.

Most employees would always request for experienced candidates with three or more years of job experience, knowing well that fresh graduates does not have these experiences. As such, Nigerian graduates struggles to be engaged into different types of employment both in public and private sector.

Due to the quest to secure a job, fresh graduate jump into jobs that are not related to their field and expose their lack of skill. This includes those who go into self-employment, due to limited finance, most of them start up a business that is not related to their area of study. In his study, Atakpa, (2011), stated that in spite of the entrepreneurship courses offered in higher Institutions, Nigerian graduates in recent times are still struggling and seeking for salaried jobs which are not available. Therefore, it is essential to discover the magnitude to which this is true among graduates of higher institution in Nigerian.

Research Questions:

The following are the research questions to consider in this study:

- ❖ What is the importance of employability skill awareness among Nigeria undergraduates?
- ❖ What is the relationship of the one year NYSC to employability skill?
- ❖ What is the perception of the employees on fresh graduates?
- ❖ What is the perception of fresh graduates on employability skill?

Research Objectives:

The main objective of this research is to investigate the following:

- ❖ To understand the importance of employability skills awareness among Nigerian undergraduates.
- ❖ To analyse the one year NYSC experience in related area of study.
- ❖ To understand the perception of employees on fresh graduates.
- ❖ To analyse the perception of fresh graduates on employability skill.

Job Experience for Nigerian Graduates:

In May 1973, the Nigerian government introduced a scheme for graduate of Higher education which involves nation building and development, this is known as the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). Participating in the National Youth Service Corps for one year therefore became the only prospect of job for

fresh graduates of the higher institutions (university, Polytechnics' and colleges of education) as a multi-purpose one-year compulsory national service, graduates gain little experiences in different fields.

However, these graduates who are now members of the national youth service corps still complains that they were allocated to jobs different from their field of study. As such, instead of improving in their different careers they end up learning other things. While the ambition an average engineering graduate is to secure employment in an oil company, government ministries and other lucrative organization, most find themselves in government primary and secondary schools teaching. These and more contributes to lack of employability skill among the Nigerian graduates of higher education.

To Improve graduates employability skills

Improving graduates employability skill has been a topic for researchers and policy makers over the years. However, this topic are still under research area as policy makers are ceaselessly planning to increase the graduate employability skill to meet the need of the current workforce.

The terms used in various countries to describe generic skills

Country	Terms used
Canada	Employability skills
United State of America	Basic skills, necessary skills, workplace know-how
United Kingdom	Core skills, key skills, common skills
France	Transferable skills
Denmark	Process independent qualifications
Germany	Key qualifications
Switzerland	Trans-disciplinary goals
Australia	Key competencies, employability skills, generic skills
Singapore	Critical enabling skills
New Zealand	Essential skills

Source: National Centre for Vocational Education Research (2003), defining generic skills report.

The employability skill, however terms it may be called generically, needs to be enhanced. Starting from the higher education institution, to employers of both public and private institutes.

❖ Instead of asking for three years working experience, opportunities should be given to fresh graduates upon completion of their compulsory one year NYSC, while training should be conducted within few months of their employment.

❖ Nigerian government should consider enacting laws that will enable graduates to secure jobs easily. Most companies and business organisation including public and private sectors would always request for 3-5 years working experience. By reducing the work experience to minimum of one year and maximum of 2 years for fresh graduates.

❖ To enhance employability skill, the federal government should integrate appropriate placement during the NYSC one year scheme. Their placement should be in line with their field of study to enable them gain more experience. The NYSC being the first-hand working opportunities for fresh graduates require careful planning and time for reflection there should also be an effective way of providing graduates with relevant employment skills, knowledge and awareness of employer culture.

❖ There should be constant relationship between public, private employers, and the higher education institutions for better coordination of graduate employability.

❖ Graduate on their own should learn additional skills including new languages during their free time. A study by Davisons and Archer (2008) reveals that lifelong learning, self-motivation, flexibility and adaptability can enhance employability skill.

Others includes risk-taking, commitment to ethical action and social responsibility and as well as technical or “hard skills” for embrace with information interactive attributes - communication skills, interpersonal skills and team working, personal attributes, including, intellect and problem solving, analytic, critical and reflective ability, preparedness for example information technology skill can enhance employability skill.

Employability skill Awareness workshops

According Isherwood (2017) commercial awareness is an attribute that is valued by employers. The higher education institution should constantly feed graduating students and alumni with information that are helpful for their employment. Isherwood in his study observed that Commercial awareness can be established by understanding what drives a potential employer’s organisation. Graduate are motivated by the core business of an employer else, they will struggle to persuade them to invest in them. Frequently reading a broadsheet newspapers and trade press are other commercial awareness (Isherwood, 2015). Another means of creating employability awareness is by organising workshops and seminars. This introduces the students to a more practical employability awareness, they learn about the organisations and business model canvas adopted for commercial awareness.

In their study, Mojarradi and Karamidehkordi (2016) states that education methods should consider the ability to work collaboratively, by thinking innovatively and solving problems in different methods. One way these skills are acquired is through expertise in the theoretical component of the higher institution’s curriculum. Graduates, private and public sector should converge to give paper presentation and business encouragement

and also guide graduates to reflect on the organisation they would like to work. Many educational institutions have incorporated practical and technical subjects in their curriculums (Hulela, 2017).

III. Methodology

For the purpose of this theoretical paper, more than 60 articles were reviewed, its target population are fresh graduates waiting for NYSC call up and few undergraduates of Nigerian universities in the central states. On the other hand, the study is not limited on the awareness and Attributes of employability skill amongst Nigerian graduates of higher education and the enhancement of Initiatives. However, the author also views some research studies in other countries through trusted websites, archives, and conference proceeding papers. Data was sourced from both primary and secondary sources.

Consequently, a lot of acknowledgement is attributed to the local research paper as it discusses about related subjects at present and the perpetuation of study which relates the employability skill amongst Nigerian graduates of higher education. Therefore, fresh graduates heading for NYSC and some undergraduates were used as respondents.

Population

This study data on awareness and attribute of employability was collected from secondary sources by adopting data from the statistical bulletin of the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), volume 28, 2017 and World Bank (2017), and a semi-structured questionnaire and interview in both the fresh graduates (NYSC) and some employee. The population involves a minimum of 61 National youth service corps (NYSC) members (fresh graduates) in Nigeria. Although more interview were conducted, the survey consist of 40 female graduates and 21 male graduates of the Nigerian Higher Education including 10 employees. The sample was selected from fresh graduates of 10 institutions of higher education in Nigeria. This is because these graduates are the ones ready to face the labour market and or start up business. Hence 61 fresh graduates participated in the questionnaires. The survey was conducted during the 2019 Batch B pre-mobilisation workshop. The selection of participants were designed in order to ensure that all respondent are represented in the sample, including few undergraduate students.

National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)

The NYSC was established by the federal government of Nigeria in 1973 for nation building and development. The scheme is designed for all fresh graduates to pass through a compulsory one year training. This helps the fresh graduate to gain working experience.

Although the scheme is designed to be based on developing and encouraging a better connection among young Nigerians, and to gain working experience, but due to the influx of graduate became high. Graduates are no longer posted to their related area of study. Hence, NYSC members now gain little or no experience in their related field of study.

Research Instruments:

In this study, structured survey and questionnaire are the instrument used. To enhance awareness and attribute of employability skill among Nigerian graduates of higher education using interview and questionnaire methods.

IV. Findings and Discussions

From the time when independence was reached in 1960, Nigeria has relatively advanced in job creation, and in the education of its people with the objective of transferring these skills to improving productivity trade and industry development. The growth of higher education sector begins with the then university of Ibadan to 500 universities in Nigeria, but currently Nigeria has about 43 Federal Universities, 48 State Universities, and 79 Private Universities.

Regardless of the increase number of universities in Nigeria to a total of 170 universities with constant growth of student enrolment, there is a constant report of graduate unemployment. Graduates of higher education institutes and secondary schools' leavers in Nigeria are becoming more and more unemployed owing to lack of marketable skills for self-reliance. Osuala, (2004).

Oluwaseyi et al, (2018) conducted a research on Unemployment, poverty and economic growth in Nigeria, they described the behaviour of the series of poverty rate, unemployment and gross domestic product employed in the table below.

Specification	Real GDP per capita	Unemployment	Poverty rate
Mean	12.389	11.323	55.771
Median	12.207	11.9	58.6
Maximum	12.862	29.7	73.9
Minimum	12.061	1.9	34.9
Std. Dev.	0.2792	1845	12.877
Skewness	0.5990	0.7532	0.3693
Kurtosis	4.9183	2.5953	1.7909
Jarque-Bera	18.7921	3.1423	2.5932

Table 2: Source: computation from Oluwaseyi et al (2018)

It was interesting to note that in the table above, the highest unemployment rate recorded was 29.7%, while that of poverty rate is 73.9% while the standard deviation of poverty rate, is the highest, showing high

variation in poverty rate in the country over time. Therefore, neglecting the importance of unemployment by the government will be more catastrophic as the number of graduates keep increasing.

To extract the initial factor and considering the existing state of the Nigeria economy and the hypothesis surrounding it, business and employment sector are shrinking due to the significant job lost amidst the growing cadre of unemployment in both public and private sectors. As a result of these, most Nigerian graduates migrate to other developed countries where they further their studies and hoping to get employment upon graduate.

V. Conclusion:

It can be concluded that the analysis in this study in relation to the variables places the basis for future study. Three major elements to eradicate unemployment perceived by respondents were request for longer years of job experience, lack of creating major awareness of employability skill, and Individual Attributes. Owing to the high level of unemployment which in turn induces poverty and slower the economic growth of the country, this study makes it clear to understand the importance of employability skill awareness and the need to develop a conceptual framework that will assist fresh graduates and to minimise unemployment in Nigeria.

Even though this is a preliminary study, the author attempts to explore whether awareness of employability skill amongst Nigerian graduates of higher education and the enhancement of Initiatives.' Increases employability skills. It is important to educate undergraduates the essence of employability skills awareness to ensure students are cognisant of the significance of employability skills in future.

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