

Lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability in Nigeria. Findings revealed that majority of the lecturers agreed that there is need for the undergraduates to acquire transferable skills and a broad-based experience. Also revealed that majority of the lecturers agreed that the undergraduates need to be exposed to internship and work experience irrespective of their field of study. In addition, majority of the lecturers agreed that guidance and counselling services should be vigorously pursued and revived in our institutions of learning. Based on the findings of this study, some recommendations were made; School authority should expose the undergraduates to internship and work experience scheme irrespective of their field of study. School authority should establish guidance and counselling unit to provide supportive service for the students especially on career-related issues. Government should improve the school environment by providing adequate infrastructural facilities, instructional materials that will enhance broad-based experience among the undergraduates.

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1. Introduction

Graduates' employment model has taken a new dimension all over the world (Tran, 2016) Graduates with the same qualification have flooded the labour market seeking or struggling for the available limited jobs. The employers of labour are downsizing due to economic challenges in the society. Also, there is a general consensus among the employers of labour that graduates from universities lack prerequisite skills required to function in the field of work (Marope, 2006). All these make employability of the university graduates a challenge.

Employability is a concept that pictures the economic and political state of the nation as currently being experienced (Brown, Hesketh & Williams, 2004). Policy-makers and decision-takers in general, believe that social justice, economic growth and development are built on the premise of knowledge and skills acquired by individuals for employment in a nation whose economy is founded on knowledge (Tomlinson, 2007). Employability is the enabling capacity of an individual to be gainfully employed according to his or her educational requirements (Dearing, 1997).

Wickramasinghe and Perera (2010), highlighted three key elements of employability namely: the ability to get first employment, ability to keep the job, make changes between jobs and function in the same organisation to meet new job demands, and the ability to get new jobs by being self-dependent in the job market and being able to manage changes within the organisation. Employability of a given individual refers to attributes in terms of skills, dexterities and competencies which are deployed and put to use, the logical presentation of these attributes to employers' and the context in which the individual works and fits in (Hillage & Pollard, 1998).

However, university education has the potentials of producing potential graduates who are employable, and this prospect has caught the eyes of policymakers and researchers. This is due to two factors. First, there are signals which point to the evolving trends in science and technology, climate change and globalisation which has altered the workforce (Oliver, 2015; Pitan, 2015). Second, Newton (2015), the effect of shift in paradigm with respect to employability is that graduates should not only have a good degree, but they must also possess the needed skill, knowledge and competency to function and compete healthily in an ever-changing world like ours. In addition, the existing curriculum in our higher institutions does not equip the graduates with the right skills and knowledge needed to excel in the competitive world of employment (Lee, 2002).

There exists an established criticism on the mode of teaching and learning as it is opined that it has little relevance to the development of a country (Rufai, Bakar & Rashid, 2015). Studies have shown that in Nigeria unemployment experienced by University graduates is not as a result of lack of jobs but because of a backdrop in the skills and competencies possessed by graduates which employers look out for (Pitan, 2015). There is empirical evidence to back this up as statistics shows that out of over 40 million unemployed graduates in the country, 23 million are unemployable as a result of lack of appropriate skills and competencies (Emeh, Nwanguma & Abaroh, 2012).

In addition, an official of the Central Bank of Nigeria claimed that about 70% of the 80 million graduates are either unemployed or underemployed (Mahmood, 2014). In the same vein, Akanmu (2011) asserted that many youths who get jobs are not gainfully employed, and those graduates who are gainfully employed and found some level of satisfaction with the job their employers still put their skills to test, because they doubt the abilities of these graduates.

The concept of employability is an enormous task for conventional university education as it puts to question the relevance of university education, when such graduates are now found unemployable. Boateng and Ofori-Sarpong (2002), stated that 'this doubt is reasonable from the view of human capital theory, which states that the main determinant of the demand for university education is the expectation of higher salaries over the life cycle of any individual, as higher salaries are important to compensate for the high cost of the university education'. The country is currently combating the problem of unemployment and lack of employable skills amongst our university graduates has

compounded the problems, rather than address the issue of value addition to socio-economic stability that the society required to thrive (Pitan, 2015). There is need to broaden the curriculum of the Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education to accommodate understanding of economic structure of the country (Ajlbola, 2018)

Research into this study is important. First, information from this study and previous studies may be theoretical or empirical. It offers recommendations suitable for policy makers and also provides pieces of advice on the implementation of such recommendations (Ball, 2003; Sheedy, 2005). Second, there is increasing literature on the need for information on youths' changes to work, especially at the period when they graduated from a higher institution and the careers they choose (Ball, 2003). Furthermore, it is quite hard to get empirical studies that compared and investigated employability skills, lecturers' and graduates' perception of job employment immediately after graduating (Connor & Shaw, 2008).

2. Statement of the problem

The number of unemployed graduates keeps increasing on daily basis. Accordingly, this has become a worrisome phenomenon to many people; especially the employers of labour, who have consistently maintained that the graduates produced by our institutions of learning in Nigeria are not adequately prepared for the world of work, primarily with respect to the types of skills needed in the labour market, such as analytical, communication, information technology, decision making, critical thinking and entrepreneurial skills. This situation has worsened the problems of graduates' unemployment and underemployment in Nigeria. Consequently, this has given birth to various social menaces such as increase in the number of armed robbery cases, cyber-crime, drug abuse, kidnapping illegal migration and host of others in the society. In order to find lasting solutions to these problems, all the stakeholders must work towards making graduates employable. Therefore, this study is carried out to explore University lecturers' perspectives on enhancing graduates' employability in Nigeria.

3. Research questions

One research question was generated to guide the study:

- What are the lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability?

4. Hypotheses

Two hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- Are there any gender differences in the lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability?
- Are there any differences in the lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability?

5. Methodology

Descriptive survey method was adopted for the study. The target populations for this study were lecturers from the public universities in South-west Nigeria.

There are six states in South-west, Nigeria. The researchers employed simple random sampling technique in selecting one public university in each of the states, 20 lecturers were selected from each of the six public universities. 120 participants formed the sample for the study. The instrument used for data collection is a researcher self-developed questionnaire titled 'Lecturers Perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability' The questionnaire is a four-point Likert scale of 'Strongly agree' (SA), 'Agree' (A), 'Disagree' (D) and 'Strongly disagree' (SD) with the value of '4, 3, 2

and 1', respectively. It has two sections. Section A was used to collect demographic data of the respondents while, Section B consists of 20 items on strategies for enhancing university graduates' employability. The questionnaire was administered to 120 Lecturers who participated in the study. The researchers carried out the administration and collection of the instrument. All questionnaires distributed were retrieved. Frequency counts, percentage and mean scores were used to analyse the research question; while t-test and ANOVA were used to analyse the two hypotheses formulated for the study.

6. Results

6.1. Research Question1

What are the lecturer's perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability?

Table 1. Lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	S.D
1	There is need for undergraduates to acquire transferable skills and a broad-based experience	68 57%	48 40%	4 3%	– –	3.540	0.576
2	There is need to increase opportunities for students and placement work experience while in school	36 30%	65 54%	14 12%	5 4%	3.020	0.778
3	All undergraduates should go for internship irrespective of their course of study	32 39%	43 36%	37 31%	8 7%	2.690	0.907
4	Undergraduates should be trained on how to sell their own personal identity, brand and profile	42 35%	56 47%	13 11%	9 8%	3.010	0.905
5	Career advising unit should be established in the universities	57 48%	49 41%	11 7%	3 3%	3.300	0.785
6	Review of university curriculum with employers is important and necessary	47 39%	62 52%	7 6%	4 3%	3.220	0.746
7	There is need for lecturers to work in collaboration with employers of labour to update their teaching materials	56 47%	50 42%	10 8%	4 3%	3.280	0.805
8	Undergraduates should be prepared for emerging careers	45 38%	53 44%	19 16%	3 3%	3.100	0.810
9	Lecturers should be articulating relevant graduates' employability skills in learning outcomes for every subject	56 47%	53 44%	8 7%	3 3%	3.320	0.750
10	It is important to develop students' assessment activities aligned with industry practices, standard and approaches	51 43%	59 49%	6 5%	4 3%	3.270	0.750
11	Exposure of undergraduates to their disciplines career options and outcome	47 39%	51 43%	15 13%	7 6%	3.080	0.895
12	Making learning experience to focus on cognitive, affective and psychomotor domain of objectives	39 33%	38 32%	14 12%	9 9%	3.070	0.946
13	Devotion of adequate time and resources to entrepreneurial training of undergraduates	59 49%	49 41%	6 5%	6 5%	3.310	0.837
14	Organisation of seminars for undergraduates on employability skills	30 25%	37 31%	36 30%	17 14%	2.500	1.000

15	Periodic invitation of graduates to share their experience after graduation with the undergraduates	24 20%	44 37%	35 29%	17 14%	2.450	0.936
16	Periodic invitation of employers as a guest speaker for undergraduates	50 42%	53 44%	12 10%	5 4%	3.180	0.833
17	Guidance and Counselling services should be vigorously pursued and revived in our institutions	37 31%	49 41%	21 18%	13 11%	2.800	0.985
18	Undergraduates should be trained on the need for self-reliance and self-dependence	43 36%	39 33%	19 16%	19 16%	2.760	1.111
19	Funding in Universities should be increased to the prescribed 28% of the nation's budget by UNESCO	24 20%	44 37%	35 29%	17 14%	2.450	0.936
20	Undergraduates should be trained to be creative and innovative	30 25%	37 31%	36 30%	17 14%	2.500	1.000

Table 1 revealed the analysis of research question 1 (What are the lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability?). From Table 1, 97% of the participant agreed that there is need for the undergraduates to acquire transferable skills and a broad-based experience, 84% of them agreed, that there is need to increase opportunities for students and placement work experience while in school, 82% of them agreed that undergraduates should be trained on how to sell their own personal identity, brand and profile, 91% of the participants agreed that review of university curriculum with employers is important and necessary, 89% of them agreed that there is need for lecturers to work in collaboration with employers of labour to update their teaching materials, 91% of them agreed that lecturers should be articulating relevant graduates' employability skills in learning outcomes for every subject and 82% of the participants agreed that, it is necessary to expose undergraduates to their disciplines career options and outcome. In total, 90% of them agreed that it is important to devote adequate time and resources to entrepreneurial training of undergraduates, 72% of the participants agreed that guidance and counselling services should be vigorously pursued and revived in our institutions and 57% of them agreed that funding of the Universities should be increased to the prescribed 28% of the nation's budget by UNESCO. The finding of the study is in line with the position of Newton (2015), that the effect of the change in paradigm with respect to employability is that graduates should not only have a good degree, but also, they must possess the needed skill, knowledge and competency to function and compete healthily in an ever-changing world like ours. The study also corroborates the observation of Lee (2002) that curriculum existence in our higher institutions does not equip the graduates with the right skills and knowledge needed in order to excel in the competitive world of employment.

6.2. Hypotheses testing

Table 2. Summary of t-test analysis on the difference between the male and female lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability

Gender remark	N	X	SD	DF	T	Sig.
Male	63	64.094	5.739			Not
Female	67	65.809	5.050			Significant
				118	1.577	0.119

*Denotes significance at $P < 0.05$

Table 2 shows the result of the difference between the male and female lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability. The result reveals that there is no significant difference of male and female lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability ($t = 1.577$, $df = 118$, $p > 0.05$). This implied that the male lecturers' perspectives on enhancing

university graduates' employability is not significantly different from that of their female counterpart. Therefore, the null hypothesis 1 is not rejected.

Table 3. Summary of analysis of variance on the significant difference in the lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability based on years of experience

Source: decision area of specialisation	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	517.900	4			
Within Groups	2441.100	115	129.475		
Total	2959.000	119		5.039*	0.001 Significant

*Denotes significance at $P < 0.05$

Table 3 reveals the result of the difference in the lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability on the basis of years of experience. The result shows that there is a significant difference in the lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability on the basis of years of experience ($F_{(4,115)} = 5.039, p < 0.05$). This implied that lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability is significantly different on the basis of years of experience. Hence, the null hypothesis 2 is rejected.

7. Discussion

Table 1 revealed the analysis of research question 1 (What are the lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability?). From the above table, 97% of the participants agreed that there is need for undergraduates to acquire transferable skills and a broad-based experience, 84% of them agreed that there is need to increase opportunities for students and placement work experience while in school, 82% of them agreed that undergraduates should be trained on how to sell their own personal identity, brand and profile, 91% of the participants agreed that review of university curriculum with employers is important and necessary, 89% of them agreed that there is need for lecturers to work in collaboration with employers of labour to update their teaching materials, 91% of them agreed that lecturers should be articulating relevant graduates' employability skills in learning outcomes for every subject and 82% of the participants agreed that, it is necessary to expose undergraduates to their disciplines career options and outcome. In total, 90% of them agreed that it is important to devote adequate time and resources to entrepreneurial training of undergraduates, 72% of the participants agreed that guidance and counselling services should be vigorously pursued and revived in our institutions and 57% of them agreed that funding of the Universities should be increased to the prescribed 28% of the nation's budget by UNESCO.

Table 2 shows the result of the difference between the male and female lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability. The result reveals that there is no significant difference of male and female lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability. The findings of the study are a reflection that lecturers see solutions to the challenges and solutions to the grossly unemployment among graduates in the same way. The study is in line with the findings of Mahmood (2014) who claimed that about 70% of the 80 million graduates are either unemployed or underemployed.

Table 3 reveals the result of the difference in the lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability on the basis of years of experience. The result shows that there is a significant difference in the lecturers' perspectives on enhancing university graduates' employability on the basis of years of experience. The results of the findings show that experience plays a role on how individual will assess a phenomenon.

8. Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

School authority should expose undergraduates to internship and work experience scheme irrespective of their field of study.

School authority should establish guidance and counselling unit to provide supportive service for the students especially on career-related issues.

Government should improve the school environment by providing adequate infrastructural facilities, instructional materials that will enhance broad-based experience among undergraduates.

Curriculum planners should review and broaden curriculum to accommodate. Employability skills (communication skills, creative thinking skills and introduction of course on understanding structure of Nigerian economy).

University authority should create forum for lecturers and employers of labour to corroborate for delivery of learning material for employability.

University authority should be giving the school alumni the forum to share their work experience with undergraduates.

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