

Higher Education and Graduates' Unemployability in Nigeria: The Policy Implication

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Abstract

The deficient possession of relevant employability skills that have rendered many graduates unemployable in Nigeria has been a subject of national discourse among the policy makers in education in Nigeria in recent times. Graduates' unemployability poses serious psychologically imbalance on the concerned persons while economic growth of the country is adversely affected. This paper focused on higher education and graduates' unemployability in Nigeria: The policy implication. Apparently, what employers of labour are looking for in the graduates to fill job vacancies include academic qualifications, required skills, and personal characteristics. Nevertheless, employers of labour reiterated that some of Nigerian graduates though possess required qualification but do not have essential skills that will qualify them to be employed. From the available literatures, these skills include: communication, critical thinking, decision making, information technology, interpersonal, problem-solving mechanism, self directed learning, technical, numeracy and analytical and problem solving skills, entrepreneurial skills among others. This study considered Harry Jerome's structural unemployment theory. It was suggested for the policy makers the need for the adoption of internship intervention programme into the one year mandatory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme, in order to furnish the teeming graduates coming out on yearly basis from various higher institutions in Nigeria with the required skills to make them to be employable, and this was represented with a model.

Keywords: Higher Education, Employability Skills, Structural Unemployment Theory, Employers of Labour, National Youth Service Corps

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Introduction

Globally, higher education has been seen as a potent instrument for human capital development and empowering citizens. One of the motives of establishing higher institutions are to turn out high level manpower that is knowledgeable, skilled, self-reliant and relevant to the needs of the labour market. Corroborating this assertion, Idogbo (2011); Aselebe, Popoola & Oladiran (2016) stressed that tertiary education is to developing human being mentally, morally worthy in character and learning to enable them perform leadership roles in the society they find themselves.

There is no iota of doubt about the fact that Nigeria as a country is blessed with high number of higher institutions, whereas, in terms of human resource development, the rating is abysmal. Adadeji and Oyebade (2016) stressed that Nigeria was ranked 114th out of 140 countries surveyed rating their manpower development, and 106th in technological readiness, with five years as the mean number of years of schooling.

Over the years, it is evident that Nigerian tertiary institutions produce thousands of graduates into the labour market on yearly basis, and the bottom line in this situation is that insignificant percentage of the output is able to secure available jobs, and this poses a great danger in the land (Educational and Employability Survey Report, 2014). Graduates' unemployability has become a continuing subject of debate of policy priority for higher education policymakers in Nigeria in recent times and this due to a great difference between the output and number of graduate secured employments (Edinyang, Odey & Gimba, 2015; Olaniyi, 2017). Omoniwa and Adedapo (2017) see employability as an individual's capacity and willingness to become and remain attractive in the labour market. Also, it involves the individual's competence to be successful in a great diversity of jobs.

The perception of employers of labour on the capabilities and functionality of graduates in Nigeria in recent time reveals that characteristics such as analytical skills, good communication skills, good personal and social skills, technical and managerial skills among others are missing in the graduates which are turned out into the labour market on yearly basis (Anho, 2011; Akinyemi, Ofem & Ikuenomore, 2012; Kakwagh, 2013; Oni, 2014). Currently, the reflection of output from tertiary education in Nigeria indicates that some of them do not have needed skills that enhance their chance of gaining employments, and this led to continuous increase in the rate of youth unemployment (Phillips Consulting, 2014).

Uzochukwu (2015) quoting the figure from National Bureau Statistics (NBS) confirms that not less than 5.3 million youths are jobless in Nigeria, while 1.8 million graduates enter the labour market on yearly basis. Also, Edinyang, Odey and Gimba (2015); Balogun (2016) reiterated that the alarming rate of unemployment among Nigerian nation is experiencing is as a result of snowballing effect of increasing output from higher institutions and could not secure job opportunities. Longe (2017) opines that graduate unemployment is a cankerworm hindering economic vastness and developmental aspirations of the nation.

The track of graduate unemployment in Nigeria show that it rose from 1% in 1974 to 4% in 1984. Dabalén, Oni and Adekola (2000) stress that between 1992 and 1997, unemployed

labour force rose to 32% in the country. The unemployment trend in Nigeria had steadily moved from 21.1% in 2010 to 23.9% in 2011, 24.3% in 2012 to 28.5 in 2013, also, it risen from 30.0 in 2014 (Innocent, 2014). It is indicated that a total of 52million citizens within the economically active population of Nigeria are jobless, and mostly, newly qualified graduates took larger percentage (National Bureau of Statistics, 2016). Also, according to National Bureau of Statistics (2020) labour force survey, Nigeria's unemployment rate was 27% in Q2 reported in Q3.

Inferring from the statistical analysis above, it is evident that Nigeria as a country could not provide employment opportunities for the output from her tertiary institutions. According to Obanya (2004), the mandate of Nigerian higher institutions is to produce graduates with attributes such as analytical power, communicative skills, problem solving ability, team spirit, creativity, versatility and lifelong learning skills that will aid national development.

In a study conducted by Omoniwa & Adedapo, (2017) certain skills that employers of labour take cognizance of while offering jobs to prospective graduates seeking employments in Nigeria. are: good reading/writing skills, analytical and problem solving skills, data analysis and interpretation, self-confidence, computer skills, sector specific skills, communication skills, knowledge about other fields, and so on.

Olaniyi (2017) found out that the reasons why many Nigerian tertiary institutions graduates could not get job were due to the fact that they lack skills and personal attributes as requested by the employers of labour despite the fact that they possess excellent qualification. According to him, the skills required of graduates to make them employable include analytical/ research communication, critical thinking, decision making, information technology, interpersonal, problem solving, self directed learning, technical, numeracy and entrepreneurial skills.

In the opinion of Shadare and Elegbede (2012), factors such as defective manpower planning and expansion of educational facilities that have unjustifiably raised the expectations of Nigerian youths, the economic recession, continued offering jobs to expatriates, wide rural-urban migration, among others are the major factors responsible for graduates' unemployment in Nigeria.

Another reason why many Nigerian graduates could not secure job opportunity is issue of academic discipline. Graduates of certain departments have higher chances of being selected for jobs than their counterparts in some other disciplines. For instance, a graduate of Education/Accounting has a greater advantage than a graduate of pure accounting because the former can perform the tasks of an accountant and of an educationist at the same time. In the study carried out by Edinyang, Odey and Gimba (2015) revealed that academic disciplines significantly influence employability.

Previous studies had looked into assessment of graduates employability, academic factor and graduates employability and so on while there is dearth of literatures on graduates' unemployment. However, most of the available studies were carried out outside Nigeria. Therefore, this study examined higher education and graduates' unemployment in Nigeria: The policy implication.

Theoretical Framework

This study considered Harry Jerome's structural unemployment theory. The theory emphasizes the role of investment in education as a tool for accelerating economic and social achievement. Also, the theory takes cognizance of training as mechanism for enhancing individual employability skills. This is supported by Kulkarni (2013); Halidu (2015); Aselebe (2019) who found out that a worker can be self-creative, intellectually sound by exposing to training programmes. Also, no organisation can achieve optimum productivity until the individuals have applied the required skills and knowledge.

Literature Review

Higher Education in Nigeria

This is the education given after Post Basic Education in institutions such as Universities, Inter-University Centers, Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), Schools of Health and Technology, Colleges of Education, Polytechnics, Monotechnics, Colleges of Agriculture and National Teachers Institutes (NTI) (FGN, 2013). The goals of higher education as contained in the National Policy on Education (2013) are to:

- (a) Contributing to national development through high level manpower training;
- (b) Providing accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interests of all Nigerians;
- (c) Provide high quality career counseling and lifelong learning programs that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work;
- (d) Reduce skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labor market.
- (e) Promoting and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service
- (f) Forge and cement national unity; and
- (g) Promote national and international understanding and interaction

Graduate Employability

Globally, there is no doubt that tertiary institutions perform important roles in generating human capacities for leadership, management and the technical expertise. They are places where specialized human resources are developed. Graduate refers to individual with any form of post matriculation qualification or tertiary diploma or certificate (Omoniwa & Adedapo, 2017).

Edinyang, Odey and Gimba (2015) define employability as the process of possessing competence to gain initial employment, maintain employment and secure new employment if required. He stressed further that employability depends upon: assets in terms of understanding, skills and behaviours; showcasing potentials someone endowed with to the employers.

Towards Reducing Graduates' Unemployability in Nigeria: The Policy Implication

The phenomenon of graduate unemployment has reached a disquieting level in Nigeria (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). The effect of this unwholesome development on the nation's economy and the extent to which it has affected individuals are highly immeasurable. Okolie, et al. (2019) advocated that stakeholders need to pay much attention to generic skills in graduates so as to contribute greatly to the development of industries in Nigeria. Oladokun and Gbadegesin (2017) found out that inability of many Nigerian graduates to secure jobs is linked to lack of essential skills as demanded by employers of labour.

The NYSC scheme was created by decree No.24 of 22nd May 1973 for proper encouragement and development of common ties among the youths of Nigeria and the promotion of national unity. The scheme is designed primarily to inculcate in Nigerian Youths the spirit of selfless service to the community, and to emphasize the spirit of oneness and brotherhood of all Nigerians, regardless of cultural or social background (NYSC, 2017).

The establishment of NYSC is a good and welcome development. However, this can further be strengthened through inclusion of internship programme into it to enhance the required skills of the graduates being turn out of higher institutions on yearly basis. A model below reflects how graduates could be furnished with the required skills to make them employable in Nigeria.

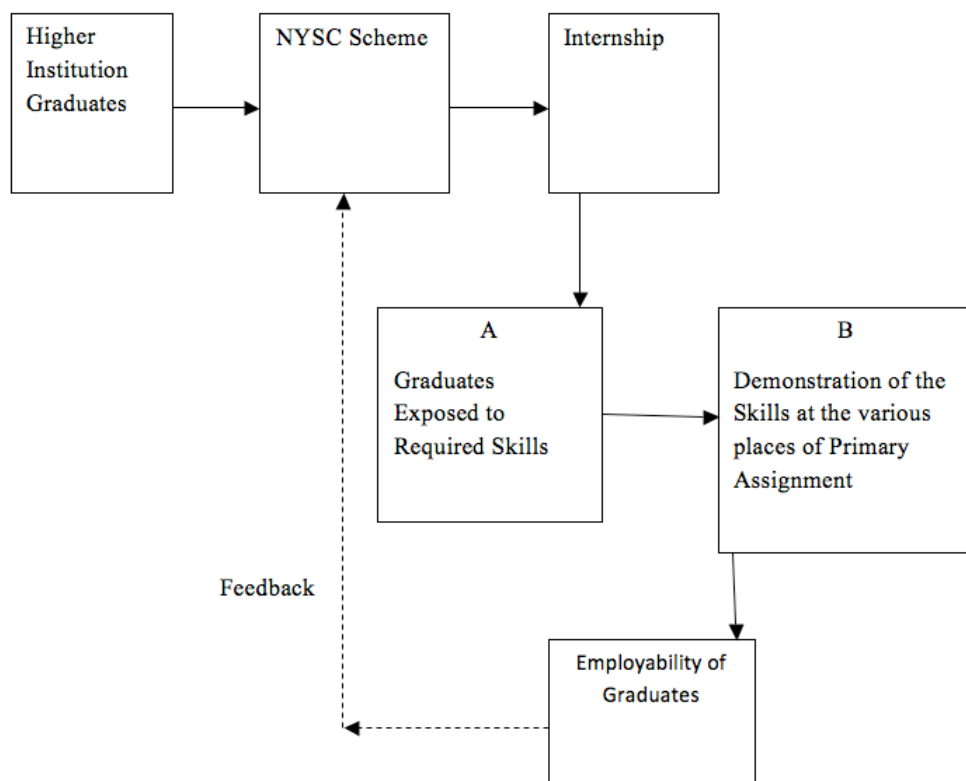


Figure 1: INTERNSHIP EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS ACQUISITION MODEL
Source: Researcher's Concept

Application of the above internship programme as contained in the model involves two stages. At stage A, participants (graduates) are expected to be exposed to the various skills. Also, at stage B, participants are expected to be posted to various places of work so as to demonstrate the required skills such as data analysis and interpretation, Good reading/writing skills, self-confidence, computer skills, sector specific skills, communication skills, professional certification, knowledge about other fields, analytical and problem solving skills they have been familiar with. Assessment will be carried out in this regard in order to know the extent to which such skills have been acquired for employability.

Conclusion

Graduates' unemployability in Nigeria has become a subject of discourse among stakeholders. Employers of labour are complaining that the quality of graduates coming out of higher institutions indicates that some of them lack the requisite skills for employment. The need to review the modus operandi of NYSC scheme to include internship intervention to improve the required skills of teeming graduates call for urgent attention.

Policy Implication

Based on the model above, the under listed are suggested for the policy makers:

NYSC scheme should be reviewed to include internship intervention, so as to furnish the Nigerian graduates with the needed skills requested by the employers of labour.

NYSC agency should make it a mandatory exercise to expose all corps members to various skills such as communication, critical thinking, decision making, information technology, interpersonal, problem-solving mechanism, self directed learning, technical, numeracy and analytical and problem solving skills, among others as demanded by employers of labour.

NYSC management should create enabling environment for the corps member to put into practice all the required skills so as to qualify them for job opportunities, and assessment should be continuously carried out all through the time of their primary assignment.

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