



Evaluation of Stakeholders' Assessment of Graduate Employability Skill in Kwara State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

*Graduate unemployment is a complex and multifaceted issue in Nigeria, and tackling the skills gap and increasing opportunities for graduates to get work experience are both crucial to bringing it down. This study evaluated stakeholders' assessment of graduate employability skills in Kwara State, Nigeria. The research utilized a descriptive survey design. Multistage sampling procedures (purposive and random sampling techniques) were used to select the respondents, who are unemployed graduates, university lecturers, and employers of labor. Four hundred and fifty stakeholders (one hundred and fifty lecturers, employers of labor, and unemployed graduates) in Kwara State were chosen as the sample for this study. A researcher-designed questionnaire titled *Questionnaire on Stakeholders' Assessment of Graduate Employability* with a reliability coefficient of 0.72 was used to collect data from the sampled stakeholders. Frequency and percentage were used to answer the two research questions raised, while the Chi-square statistical tool was used to test the hypothesis postulated in the study at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that stakeholders (university graduates and their lecturers) viewed University graduates' employability knowledge in Kwara State as fair, meanwhile the employers of labor submitted that University graduates' employability knowledge in Kwara State is low. Teamwork, problem-solving, and communication skills were found to be the most required employability skills. Also, a significant difference in stakeholders' perception of graduate employability knowledge in Kwara State was revealed. Based on these findings, it is recommended that educational stakeholders should encourage students to participate in at least one-year internships, co-ops, and job placements as part of students' formal education because it will provide real-world experience to students. Also, the education system should work in tandem with employers of labor to meet their demands in terms of the curriculum it provides.*

KEYWORDS: *Assessment, Evaluation, Graduate employability, Knowledge, Skill, Stakeholders*

1 INTRODUCTION

Education is not only for school but for a lifetime. Many parents worldwide, including Nigerians, see education as an important factor for their children to achieve success in life. One of the most trustworthy and beneficial legacies a parent can give their offspring is a good education (Erchul 2023). Matusov (2023) claimed that education is still one of the most effective means of social and personal change. Goal 4 of the sustainable development goals, which is not merely education but “quality education,” is crucial to achieving the other goals. Developed nations of the world also have this understanding that nation-building cannot become an achievable goal without the role of education in its equation. In line with this, education is a foundation upon which the citizens can build and progress to have a great nation and make the world a better place to live for all.

In Nigeria, people may choose education from many distinct educational tracks. There is a growing expectation, for example, that institutions of higher education would actively deal with the problems of the modern world and provide long-term solutions to them. This is why, since the onset of the 2008 financial crisis, politicians have been pleading with us to

put our money where our mouths are and invest in ourselves to strengthen our resilience and speed up our recovery.

1.1 Higher Education

It is important to note that tertiary education is tasked with capitalizing and building on the basic skills learners have received to prepare themselves for the labor market and make sure they become instrumental in positive change wherever they may be on the globe. Higher education, while performing its functions, provides several openings for the poor to participate successfully in the job market (Harry et al. 2018). The capacity to find and keep a job is still the most important factor in achieving a global objective. As the worldwide unemployment rate rises from 5.6% (2019) (Das & Roy 2023) to 5.8% (2020) (Ibrahim et al. 2023), many parents are wondering whether investing in their children's education is worthwhile. In Nigeria, the unemployment rate is 27.1% (Ibrahim et al. 2023).

1.2 Employability

The graduates or products of educational programs should be evaluated based on how employable they are, what the demand for them in the job market is, or how valuable they are in the path of nation-building, and this assessment should be based on the foundations created in the

classroom across all levels. Notwithstanding the importance of education to Nigeria's progress, graduates' high rates of unemployment as well as underemployment pose major challenges to national stability and economic prosperity. Nevertheless, despite the country's rich endowment of natural and human resources, the unemployment rate in Nigeria continues to rise while the country's economy continues to grow slowly for the simple reason that an ailing economy makes for a weakened society. Due to the widespread nature of unemployment in the world's labor force, the concept of employability has gained significant traction in recent years (Chukwuedo et al. 2023).

The difficulty that recent graduates in Nigeria have finding work is a direct result of the competitive nature of the modern labor market. Having the skills, expertise, attitudes, as well as innovation skills that will allow recent graduates to contribute to the organization's goals immediately after starting work is what companies appear to mean when they talk about employability (Ahmed et al. 2022). Policymakers and scholars are interested in the possibility that university education would produce students who are employable (Oliver 2015; Pitan 2016). Oliver (2015) explains that this is the result of two factors:

first, signals indicating the changing trends in science and technology, environmental degradation, and globalization have transformed the working population; second, the consequence of the dynamic process with reverence to employment prospects is that graduates must also not only have a decent education, but also acquire the required skill, expertise, and mastery to function as well as stay competitive healthfully in an ever-changing globe like ours. Moreover, the graduates of our higher educational institutions do not seem to have adequately possessed the proper skills and knowledge to succeed in today's competitive job market due to the curricula that are now in place. The study of Rufai et al. (2015) heavily criticized current methods of education because they contribute nothing to a nation's progress. Pitan's (2016) study on employability has shown conclusively that the high unemployment rate among Nigerian college graduates is not due to a lack of available opportunities, but rather to a deficiency in the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that businesses value in potential employees. Studies in this sector have not been well analyzed. Therefore, it remains unclear why so many Nigerian graduates, including graduates in Kwara State, are unable to find work after college.

However, every sane system in the economy gets affected when there is no

possibility of continuation towards development. The experts on the field are raising signals to the almighty coach, calling for competent substitutes to come in as they are not physically strong to keep the progression with the ball in their profession. Yet, it is worrisome that the issue of graduate employability remains an unbalanced story in the nation.

Nonetheless, people's ability to get jobs in modern Nigerian society has been hampered by the country's inadequate educational system. Regular snags have been experienced, most notably in terms of the rate at which educational investments pay off (Tholen 2015). In this context, educators and policymakers must work together to develop an undergraduate curriculum that teaches students the skills they will need to start their businesses and hire others. The most crucial aspect is boosting their employability.

Involved parties as well as policymakers in developed countries pleaded to establish a more concentrated educational process that is harnessed more toward acquiring necessary expertise in the higher education institutions to strengthen the seamless process into jobs for new graduates, especially degree holders of higher education institutions, in proposing alternatives to this world crisis of

joblessness (Ahmed et al. 2022). Since the targets of wealth generation, poverty alleviation, and valuation realignment are only able to be acquired and maintained using an effective and productive educational process that influences useful experience, expertise, capabilities, attitudes, and value systems into persons, education is crucial to the development of any society (Soegoto & Luckyardi 2020). Pitan (2016) defines employability as the information, skills, qualities, and attitudes that graduates acquire and demonstrate to secure and advance in careers in which they may realize their full potential. Hence, employability skills are the set of competencies that students need to acquire and retain careers that provide them with personal and professional satisfaction (Chillas et al. 2015). Over the years, in the nomenclature of great academic scholars, employability has been expressed as a cumulative process and never an instantaneous process. Learning is a process that continues throughout one's life, and it includes acquiring, honing, and applying the traits, abilities, and information that will lead to professional and personal fulfillment.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

In Kwara State, Nigeria, there exists a growing concern regarding the employability skills possessed by graduates

entering the workforce. Despite the substantial investment in higher education, there is a perceived gap between the skills acquired by graduates and the expectations of employers. This misalignment raises questions about the effectiveness of current educational curricula, training programs, and the overall readiness of graduates for the job market. Employers are increasingly vocal about their desire for college grads with strong transferable skills (including problem-solving, analytical, and reflective thinking, interpersonal and teamwork abilities, clear communication, identity, integrity, as well as a high degree of individual ethics, personality, subconscious, organization, and translation of ideas into action) and the onus is on the university to ensure that this happens. This calls for an assessment of Nigerian college freshmen's marketability.

Recent research has focused on the topic of graduate employability skills in Nigeria and elsewhere (Olufemi, 2020; Adelowokan et al. 2019; Okay-Somerville & Scholarios 2019; Harry et al. 2018; Soegoto & Luckyardi 2020; Shabbir et al. 2021; Ahmed et al. 2022). Very little research has been done to determine how different groups of people in Kwara State, Nigeria, feel about the employability skills of recent graduates.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

To boost graduate employability in Kwara State, Nigeria, it is required to fill the void by analyzing the evaluation of stakeholders' assessment of graduate employability skills. Specifically, the study aimed to examine:

- i. The extent of Kwara State stakeholders' perception of university graduates' employability knowledge.
- ii. Kwara State stakeholders' perception of the most required graduates' employability skills
- iii. The difference in stakeholders' perception of graduate employability knowledge in Kwara State.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions were asked and answered in the study:

- i. To what extent do stakeholders (university graduates, lecturers, and employers of labor) in Kwara State perceive university graduates as having employability knowledge?
- ii. What do stakeholders (university graduates, lecturers, and employers of labor) in Kwara State perceive as the most required graduates' employability skills?

1.6 Research Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant difference in stakeholders' perceptions of graduate employability knowledge in Kwara State.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to examine the evaluation of stakeholders' assessment of graduate employability skills in Kwara State, Nigeria. This design has been chosen since it aids in the collection of information that can be generalized to the population and provides a relatively straightforward approach to studying values, attitudes, beliefs, and motives (Pandey & Pandey, 2021). The population is lecturers, unemployed graduates, and employers of labor in Kwara State. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were adopted, and a total of four hundred and fifty stakeholders (one hundred and fifty each from lecturers, employers of labor, and unemployed graduates) in Kwara State were chosen as the sample for this study. The instrument was validated using face and content validity methods. It was equally subjected to test re-test reliability, yielding a coefficient of 0.72. Frequency and percentage were used to answer the two research questions raised, while the Chi-square statistical tool was used to test the hypothesis postulated in the study at a 0.05 level of significance.

3 RESULTS & DISCUSSION

3.1 Research Question One:

To what extent do stakeholders (university graduates, lecturers, and employers of labor) in Kwara State perceive university graduates as having employability knowledge?

To answer research question one, participating stakeholders' responses to items that elicited information on graduate employability knowledge in the questionnaire were independently subjected to percentage analysis. The minimum, maximum, and range scores for university graduates were 41, 63, and 22, respectively. The range was divided into three levels (low, fair, and high). The cut-off was 7. Thus, 41-47, 48-54, and 55- 63 indicated the low, fair, and high extent of graduate employability knowledge, respectively. For lecturers, the minimum, maximum, and range scores were 37, 64, and 27, respectively. The range was divided into three levels (low, fair, and high). The cut-off was 9. Thus, scores of 37-45, 46-54, and 55-64 indicated the low, fair, and high extent of graduate employability knowledge as assessed by lecturers.

Table 1. Summary of stakeholders' assessment of the extent of university graduates' employability knowledge

Stakeholders	Extent of Graduates' Employability Knowledge		
	Low	Fair	High
Graduates	51 (34%)	56 (37.3%)	43 (28.7%)
Lecturer	46 (30.7%)	67 (44.7%)	37 (24.7%)
Employer of Labor	83 (55.3%)	60 (40%)	7 (4.7%)

Source: (Survey data, 2023)

Similarly, for employers of labor, the minimum, maximum, and range scores were 39, 64, and 25, respectively. The range was divided into three levels (low, fair, and high). The cut-off was 8. Thus, scores of 39–46, 47–54, and 55–64 indicated the low, fair, and high extent of graduate employability knowledge as assessed by employers of labor. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows that 34%, 30.7%, and 55.3% of graduates, lecturers, and employers of labor, respectively, perceived graduate employability knowledge to be low. In addition, 37.3%, 44.7% and 40% of graduates, lecturers, and employers of labor, respectively, perceived graduate employability knowledge to be fair, while 28.7%, 24.7%, and 4.7% of graduates, lecturers, and employers of labor, respectively, perceived graduate employability knowledge to be high.

This implies that 56 (37.3%) graduates perceived themselves as having fair employability knowledge. Similarly, 67

(44.7%) of their lecturers perceived them as having fair employability knowledge. However, 83 (55.3%) employers of labor submitted that graduate employability knowledge is low.

3.2 Research Question Two:

What do stakeholders (university graduates, lecturers, and employers of labor) in Kwara State perceive as the most required graduates' employability skills?

To answer research question two, participants' responses to items on each of the employability skills in the questionnaire were independently subjected to descriptive analysis, and the results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that graduates, lecturers, and employers of labor perceived teamwork skills, with respective highest means of 32.0, 32.4, and 31.1, as the most required employability skills for university graduates in Kwara State. This is followed by problem-solving skills, with respective means of 25.93, 26.79, and 28.93 for graduates, lecturers, and employers of labor. Communication skills ranked next, with respective means of

21.96, 21.35, and 21.08 for graduates, lecturers, and employers of labor.

Table 2. Mean of stakeholders' perception of the most required graduates' employability skills

Employability Skills	N	Stakeholders		
		Graduate (Mean)	Lecturer (Mean)	Employer of Labor (Mean)
Lifelong Learning	150	21.14	21.25	20.88
Problem-Solving	150	25.93	26.79	28.93
Emotional Intelligence	150	20.76	21.22	20.64
Teamwork	150	32.00	32.40	31.10
Commitment to Self-development	150	14.95	15.87	15.43
Communication	150	21.96	21.35	21.08

Source: (Survey data, 2023)

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in stakeholders' perceptions of graduate employability knowledge in Kwara State.

To test hypothesis one, stakeholders' responses to items on perceived graduate employability knowledge were subjected to chi-square analysis. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 above revealed a p-value of 0.000, which is less than the significant value of 0.05 ($0.000 < 0.05$). Thus, hypothesis one is rejected, which implies that there is a significant difference in stakeholders' perceptions of graduate employability knowledge in Kwara State.

3.3 Discussion of Findings

The study's findings indicated that stakeholders (university graduates and their lecturers) viewed university graduates' employability knowledge in Kwara State as fair; meanwhile, the employers of labor that will absorb or employ the university products (graduates) submitted that university graduates' employability knowledge in Kwara State is low. This result is a true reflection of the fact that employers of labor are the practitioners and are abreast of employability knowledge that makes their business thrive to maximize profit.

This study verified Babatunde and Adebayo's (2019) conclusion that employers judged Nigerian graduates to have insufficient marketable competencies and expertise, notably in interaction, collaboration, and problem-solving. Employers frequently ascribed the skills mismatch to the exploratory nature of higher education as well as the fewer choices for pragmatic training and job experience, according to the report.

This negative impression of university graduates' job skills is the result of Igbinedion and Okungbowa (2018), who discovered that business owners in Nigeria were broadly unhappy with the standard of quality delivered by universities, quoting

challenges such as insufficient skills as well as poor work ethic. According to stakeholders' perceptions, the survey also found that collaboration, problem-solving, as well as excellent communication skills, are variables impacting graduates' employment in Kwara State.

This survey found that cooperation is still the most sought talent required to render graduates marketable in Kwara State, trailed by problem-solving and interacting with others. Good interpersonal relationships (teamwork) and the ability to solve problems and express oneself are prerequisites for successful living. It is, therefore, not surprising that teamwork, problem-solving, and communication skills are the most sought-after employability skills.

This is also like the results of Babatunde and Adebayo (2019), who said that a lack of employability competencies like interpersonal skills, teamwork, as well as problem-solving abilities led to a high proportion of graduate long-term unemployment. This contradicts the findings of Chillas, Marks, and Galloway (2015), who discovered that many employers construed a gap between the competencies and expertise acquired by graduates as well as the capabilities needed for employment, especially in the domains

of business knowledge, innovation skills, and enterprise development, in research on graduate employability in Scotland - a case of employer perceived notion.

As the present research also showed, stakeholders' views on graduates' capacity to find work after college are important. According to Owoyemi and Afolabi (2020), the inconsistency between university curricula as well as the requirements of the employment market, the primarily conceptual nature of higher education, and the limited chances for pragmatic job training and employment are all elements that contribute to the discrepancy in stakeholders' opinions.

A significant difference in stakeholders' perception of graduates' employability knowledge in Kwara State was revealed. Employers of labor pointed out that university graduates significantly possessed low employability knowledge. This corroborates the fact that employers of labor are to maximize profits, and to do that, a satisfactory level of knowledge is desired of their employees. This will help them to favorably compete with their counterparts (business owners) and maximize profit in the long run.

This finding is consistent with those of Owoyemi and Afolabi (2020), who conducted a survey of three different

stakeholders, particularly regarding graduates, business owners, as well as university lecturers, and discovered that while degree holders and lecturers regarded graduates' employability experience and competencies as surprisingly high, business owners consistently ranked them markedly lower.

4 CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Addressing the skill gap and providing more opportunities for graduates to gain job experience is essential to reduce the rate of graduate unemployment in Nigeria, which is a complicated and multidimensional problem.

Kwara State's stakeholders, including the graduates' parents, have a strong interest in seeing their children succeed in the world. Therefore, the state's alarmingly high graduate unemployment rate comes as a major letdown. However, the survey finds that Kwara State employers of labor have a poor opinion of the employability expertise of university graduates. Evidence suggests that improving graduates' chances of finding a job in the state requires an approach that emphasizes collaboration, problem resolution, and communication. As a result, the report urges all parties involved in education to pay attention to the state's pressing need for college graduates

and start working together to improve the quality of their output by incorporating appropriate techniques and methods into the curriculum from the start to develop the necessary skills. In light of the results of this investigation, the following recommendations have been made:

- i. Educational stakeholders should push for students to participate in at least one-year internships, co-ops, and job placements as part of students' formal education. Students may benefit from this in that it provides them with real-world experience that can enhance their resumes.
- ii. The education system must work in tandem with businesses to meet the demands of those businesses in terms of the curriculum it provides. It may also inspire new courses of study tailored to the demands of business.
- iii. Schools may provide kids access to career counseling to assist them figure out what they are good at, where they need improvement, how to make a strategy to reach their professional objectives, and so on.
- iv. Soft skills such as communication, conflict resolution, teamwork, leadership, and flexibility are essential for today's graduates to succeed in the workforce. Learning and development of these abilities should be facilitated by educational institutions.

- v. Schools in Kwara State should promote entrepreneurship education by providing students with access to a variety of resources, including seed money, mentoring, and guidance as they launch their businesses.
- vi. To ensure that the graduates can stay up with the latest developments in their chosen fields and technologies, schools should provide them with upskilling and reskilling opportunities.
- vii. Lastly, collaboration between educational institutions and the public and private sectors should incentivize businesses to hire recent graduates.

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