

INFLUENCE OF HIGHER EDUCATION ON EMPLOYABILITY AS PERCEIVED BY LECTURERS OF UNIVERSITY OF ILORIN, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the perception of university lecturers on influence of higher education on employability across the variables of gender, length of service and faculty. Sixty lecturers from five out of the eleven faculties in the University of Ilorin, Nigeria responded to three hypothetical scenario formulated to measure their perception. Findings of the study revealed that respondents perceived that science-oriented faculties have higher levels of influence on employability. Specifically, the faculties of science and technology and agriculture were ranked highest in this direction. However, the responses from the sample revealed no significant difference in their perception based on gender and length of service. These findings underscored the need for higher education to take an overtly focus on its academic provision in such that the demands of global labour market is taken into account. Thus, there is the need to rejuvenate university lecturers through induction programmes that would update and equip them on the global expectations on employability of youths.

Keywords: Influence, Employability, Perception

Introduction

The global economic recession and continuous increase in the rate of unemployed youths have triggered the attention of world leaders on the need to develop manpower that will translate to eradication of poverty. In September 2000, 189 leaders across the globe met at the Millennium Summit and committed themselves (and their respective countries) to the *mighty*

eight goals known as Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is unfortunate that at the close of a decade after the goals (MDGs) were set a significant number of African countries are lagging behind and squarely faced with the challenges of achieving the global desire. Nigeria, one of the countries in the sub-Saharan Africa, is specifically battling with the ever-increasing rate of unemployment. Thus, unless the ugly sphinx is identified and removed, the dream of achieving the MDGs would remain a flirting illusion.

Considering the rate at which a large numbers of graduates were being disqualified during job tests and interviews because of their inability to meet up with the globalised employment requirements of the modern world, it is thus imperative to build employability curricula into higher education. It will help to remove the clog in the wheel of the national drive toward achieving the MDGs as much and timely as possible.

In order to improve on the level of graduate employability, higher institutions in Nigeria must recognize that for many students the transition from education into employment is not a straight-forward task and in the past many students have been ill-equipped for this transition. Since the time technological revolution gained attention the issue of skilled work-force has been exacerbated because of the considerable expansion in the numbers of graduates who could not gain employment within a relatively short period of time. Furthermore, Steven and Fallows (1998) inferred that the nature of graduate employment is changing; today it is only a small fraction of graduate that can hold any realistic expectation of employment in a position directly related to the discipline studied. This particularly is the case for those students whose focus remains within traditional academic disciplines. It is a conspicuous fact that today's graduate are faced with a quite different employment challenge than that of earlier generations of which majority of those employed to teach them had experienced. The results of a research conducted in America on behalf of the Association of Graduate Employers in 1995 indicated that unemployed graduates felt "short changed" by higher education institutions which had failed to note that the "rules of the game had changed" and consequently (despite fulfilling the traditional goal of a "good degree") had not provided them with the essential skills for employment (Steven and Fallows, 1998).

According to Fearn (2009), the best way to make a graduate globally employable is by putting a lot of pressure on students to develop the skills involved in digesting tense and difficult materials, teasing out argumentative structure and then producing powerful, clear, argumentative analysis. If the higher institutions could run expanded curriculum that accommodates dynamic ideas of philosophical context and technological construct, then the

graduates of today can fully expect to still be relevant (employable) in the world of work in the next three decades.

Nigeria, like some other countries of the world, believes that higher education should contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training, inculcate intellectual skills and develop intellectual capability of individual. In this direction the country has many higher institutions (both private and public) spread all over the regions. It therefore becomes imperative to conduct a study of this nature that sought the perception of university lecturers on the influence of higher education on employability.

Statement of the Problem

The world of work is changing along with the trend of globalization and people, unlike in the past, are faced with an uneasy challenge of becoming multi-skilled workers. In Nigeria today, hundreds of thousands of graduates are roaming the street looking for employment where only few but highly competitive vacancies exist. The inability of many of them to secure employment could easily be traced to their failure to satisfy job requirements, especially skills and ideas in modern technology. It is rather unfortunate, that, enhancing employability skills within higher education has only remained a dream for a long time. In an effort to enhance graduate employability, Steven and Fallows (1998) reported that, the university of Luton did take the necessary steps to ensure that, in addition to being knowledgeable in the specific subject matter associated with a particular academic discipline or field of study, every student is fully equipped, at graduation, with the skills necessary for the very important transition into the world of employment. It is against this background that this study investigated the perception of lecturers of university of Ilorin, Nigeria on the influence of higher education on employability.

Research Question

1. What are the perceptions of university lecturers on the influence of various fields of study on employability?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were tested:

1. There is no significant difference on the perception of university lecturers on influence of higher education on employability based on gender.
2. There is no significant difference on the perception of university lecturers on influence of higher education on employability based on length of service.
3. There is no significant difference on the perception of university lecturers on influence of higher education on employability based on faculty.

Method

The study is a descriptive survey. It used both parametric and inferential techniques to determine the results of the hypotheses, while the measure of central tendency was used to determine the degree of influence of higher education on employability in respect of the field of study. . The population of the study comprises of all lecturers in the University of Ilorin while simple random sampling technique was used to select the faculties and respondents that participated in the study. A sample size of 60 lecturers was used for the study and the data collected analyzed using the mean, t-test, analysis of variance and the Duncan Multiple Range Test (DRMT). All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance. The results of the analysis are described below.

Results

Tables 1: Summary Table showing perception of university lecturers on influence of various fields of study on employability

S/N	Field of Study	Mean	Ranking
1.	Science and Technology	8.81	1 st
2.	Agriculture	8.73	2 nd
3.	Engineering	7.63	3 rd
4.	Medicine	7.60	4 th
5.	Education	7.51	5 th
6.	Law	5.04	6 th
7.	Arts	4.72	7 th

The summary on table 1 shows the mean of responses on influence of different fields of study on employability as perceived by university lecturers. The field of Science and Technology has the highest mean of 8.81 while Agriculture came 2nd with a mean of 8.73. The fields of engineering, medicine and education had mean scores of 7.63, 7.60 and 7.51 respectively. The fields of Law and Arts ranked 6th and 7th with mean scores of 5.04 and 4.72 respectively. These are clear indication that science-oriented faculties have higher levels of influence on employability. This finding is in line with Fearn (2009) who asserted that the best way to make graduates globally employable is for higher institutions learning to run expanded curriculum that accommodates dynamic ideas of philosophical context and technological construct, that could make graduates of today relevant (employable) in the world of work in the next three decades.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference on the perception of university lecturers on influence of higher education on employability based on gender.

Table 2: Mean, Standard Deviation Degree of Freedom and t-value of perception on influence of higher education on employability based on gender

Gender	N	X̄	SD	Df	Calculated t-value	Critical t-value
Male	48	2.60	1.176	58	-0.92	1.96
Female	12	2.45	1.183			
Total	60	5.05				

The result of the t-test indicated that the calculated t-value (-0.92) is less than the critical t-value (1.96). Hence, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the perception of university lecturers with respect of gender is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference on the perception of university lecturers on influence of higher education on employability based on length of service.

Table 3: Mean, Standard Deviation, Degree of Freedom and t-value of perception on influence of higher education on employability based on length of service

Length of Service	N	X̄	SD	Df	Calculated t-value	Critical t-value
1 – 15 years	42	2.50	1.527	58	1.22	1.96
Above 15 years	12	2.45	1.183			

The result of the t-test on table 2 indicated that the calculated t-value (1.22) is less than the critical t-value (1.96). Thus, the null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the perception of university lecturers according to length of service is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant difference on the perception of university lecturers on influence of higher education on employability based on faculty.

Table 4: Analysis of Variance Result Comparing Perception of university lecturers on influence of higher education on employability based on faculty

Sources of Variance	Degree of Freedom	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	Calculated F-ratio	Critical F-value
Between Groups	1	175.9122	756.891	4.71*	3.00
Within Groups	58	5106.4667	225.715		
Total	59	5282.3789			

*Significant, $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows that the calculated F-ratio (4.71) is greater than the critical F-value (3.00). Therefore, the null hypothesis, which states that there is no significant difference in the perception of university lecturers according to faculty, is rejected, $F(df = 1 \& 58) = 4.71, p < 0.05$. University lecturers

therefore differ in their perception on influence of higher education on employability based on the faculty to which they belong.

Table 5: Duncan's Multiple Range Test (DMRT) showing direction of significant difference

Group	Value	\bar{X}	Count	Duncan's Grouping
1	Faculty of Agriculture	48.61	8	A
2	Faculty of Engineering	42.73	12	A
3	Faculty of Education	36.52	18	B
4	Faculty of Arts	39.87	14	A
5	Faculty of Business and Social Sciences	36.74	8	B

NB: Means with the same letter are not significantly different

The result of the DMRT indicated that faculties of education and Business and Social Sciences are similar with means of 36.52 and 36.74 respectively. On the other hand, groups Faculties of Agriculture, Engineering and Arts are similar with means of 48.61, 42.73 and 39.87 respectively.

Discussion

The results of the findings showed that university lecturers perceived that higher education has influence on employability. However, they believe that the degree of influence of higher education on employability vary across different fields of study. Thus, the analysis on table 1 shows that the field of Science and Technology is perceived as having the highest influence on employability. This finding is in agreement with the work of Babalola (2009), who stated that the digital revolution and globalization have brought new business culture which emanated from science and now controls the labour market. Similarly, Steven and Fallows (1998) reported that the University of Luton became science inclined when faced with the challenge of graduating employable students. Then, if Nigeria is to achieve the goals of higher education, which bother on developing required manpower, there is need to entrench compulsory science and technology programme in higher education curriculum, irrespective of the peculiarity of various fields.

The field of Agriculture ranked 2nd as the perceived field that influence employability. In a similar position, Babalola (2009) suggested that, if Nigeria must achieve desired productivity level and eradicate mass unemployment, participation in agriculture would be a better option. Thus, when higher institution students are exposed to agriculture (no matter how elementary) it may help to inculcate the spirit of self-reliance, which translates to employability. The field of education ranked 5th. The reason that may be adduced could be that, majority of graduate from the faculty of education have stereotype orientation; they limit themselves to teaching alone, which may affect their employability since the labour market is been globalised and has become complex. The field of medicine ranked 4th. The idea could be that the graduates from such field are also trained and limited

by the red tape of their professional ethic to only practice within the field. Arts and Law ranked 6th and 7th respectively, which implies that the fields have limited influence on employability.

The result of the first null hypothesis indicated that there was no significant difference in the perception of university lecturers on influence of higher education on employability based on gender. The findings disagree with the study of Atunde (2009) where expressions of male and female young adults were significantly different. The plausible reason for the result of the present study could be that both male and female lecturers are well involved in the teaching and other university programmes and hence, they share similar view, unlike the young adults that participated in the previous study who possessed wider variables.

The result of the second hypothesis showed that there is no significant difference in the perception of university lecturers on influence of higher education on employability based on length of service. This result agrees with the findings of Apata (2009) in which lecturers do not differ in their perception of student performance based on length of service. The reason for the similarity could be that, irrespective of length of service, the lecturers are well grounded in the academic programme of different fields of study and may thus possess similar view about the entire academic industry.

The third null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, there is significant difference in the perception of lecturers on influence of higher education on employability based on faculty. The result disagrees with the findings of Apata (2009) in which lecturers from different faculties expressed similar view on students' performance. The reason for the present result may be that, lecturers from the faculties differently perceived influence of higher education on employability because they have different academic orientations based on their chosen fields.

Recommendations

Higher education in Nigeria should take an overtly focus to its academic provision and take full account of the demands of global labour market. It is therefore important to entrench compulsory entrepreneurial programme into the university curriculum. As it was done in the University of Luton, higher education should embed employability skills into each level of the undergraduate study. There should be research informed dialogue with academics and other stakeholders to enhance curriculum responsiveness.

It is also important to shift emphasis from obvious emphasis on certificated head knowledge to holistic higher education in which emphasis will be placed on pragmatism. There is the need to rejuvenate university lecturers through induction programmes that will update and equip them on the global expectation on higher education and employability.

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