

Higher Education and Sustainable Development in the 21st Century: Implications on Youth Employability

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Abstract

Employability is to have a set of knowledge, skills, personal attributes and understanding that make a person more likely to secure and choose occupations in which they can be successful and satisfied. This paper, thus, examined Higher Education and Sustainable Development in the 21st Century: Implications on Youth Employability. The study adopted the descriptive survey research. The population consists of all higher institutions and students in Oyo State. Three higher institutions were used for the study. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 450 students from the three higher institutions. The instrument used for this study was questionnaire; data collection and collation were based on questions raised through Assessment of “Higher Education and Youth Employability Questionnaire” (HEYEQ) which was used to collect relevant information on the Higher Education and sustainable development implications on youth employability. The reliability of the instrument was ascertaining using Cronbach Alpha and Coefficient was found to be 0.75. Four research questions were raised for the study, simple percentage was used to answer the research questions. The findings revealed that university curriculum is not relevant to the world of work; students did not have confidence in university education and the link between university education and the world of work. Therefore, recommendations were made that university curriculum should be reviewed urgently and entrepreneurial education should be of more practical than theoretical.

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Introduction

Over the decades, youths in Nigeria faced many challenges which affect their well-being and development. Among the greatest of these challenges are unemployment and the lack of decent work which several nations have struggled unsuccessfully to address. Also, despite the progress made in raising basic literacy rates, Nigeria educational system have not been able to provide its youth populations with the skills and quality education they need for the world of work. Traditional education systems and training programmes have done little to resolve the significant mismatch between the skills possess and those required by employers in today's fast developing worldwide economy.

Higher education should ensure that present and future generations of youth have the necessary tools they need to effectively navigate the school-to-work transition and secure decent work which is essential for the well-being of both youth and the economy as a whole. Thus, youths need relevant knowledge, skills, aptitudes and competencies to help them get jobs and establish career pathways. When education and training are supported at the macro level, they are important means of enhancing their employability.

As the request for skilled labour increases owing to technological advancements, globalization, and the changing organization of work, quality education and appropriate training will be key to addressing employment challenges in this 21st century. 21st Century Skills according to Chalkiadaki (2018) encompasses a wide range of skill sets and professional attributes which include social and civic competences, creativity, critical thinking, divergent thinking, developed cognitive and interpersonal skills, work autonomy, responsible national and global citizenship, acceptance and understanding of diversity, recognition and development of personal attributes, interactive use of tools, accountability, communication in mother tongue and foreign languages, digital competence, mathematical and science competence, consciousness of interdependence, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, leadership,

cultural awareness and expression, physical well-being and team working especially in heterogeneous groups.

Concept of Employability

Storen & Aamodt, (2010) viewed employability as the benefit and practicality of study programs for career and work tasks. Bemtson, (2008) as cited by Alrifai and Raju (2019) viewed employability as an individual's perception of his /her possibilities of getting equal, new and better job. Employability according to Hillage and Pollard (1998) as cited by Sharma and Trivedi (2023) is tied in with having the capacity to obtain support business, vital work and access progressed business if necessary.

In addition, Subramanian (2017) defined employability skills as general skills that are essential for success in the labor market at all employment levels and in all sectors. Employability according to Confederation of British Industry, (2009) is a set of skills, attributes, and knowledge that all labour market participants should own to ensure they have the competence of being effective in the workplace -to the benefit of their employer, themselves and the wider economy.

Concept of Employability of Youth in Nigeria

Education is one of the major tools that shape people's potential and contribute to the nation's growth and development. Universities education plays a crucial role through their teaching, community development and research activities in promoting local and national economic growth and innovation, supporting businesses and communities and supplying employable and highly skilled graduates (Mkude et al., 2003; International Labour Office 2012a; International Labour Office, 2012b; World Bank, 2014; Mirondo, 2017). Employability skills are vital for accomplishment in the workplace. Long-term economic growth can only be attained through investment in a highly skilled workforce and in context of knowledge economy; higher education has become mainly critical in this regard.

Employability according to Lalitha and Lal (2022) is having a set of knowledge, skills, personal attributes and understanding that make a person more likely to secure and choose occupations in which they can be successful and satisfied. Youth face specific problems on

the labor market, creating a threat group, regardless of their qualifications. The main barrier for young people in finding a job is the lack of employability skills. Numerous institutions and scholars have emphasised that workplace in the future will require skills in fore-sighted and critical thinking, collaboration amongst different disciplines and innovative solutions for effective management of scarce resources (Wiek, Withycombe and Redman (2011) & Fahey 2012).

It is generally observed that the current education and training system in Nigeria University does not produce graduates who have the ability to be employed by someone, who have the ability to create their own jobs and who have ability to remain when employed. The introduction of entrepreneurship education in universities as part of the government's effort has not significantly resulted in an increase in graduates embarking on an entrepreneurial path.

Youth in higher institutions of learning constitute the main decision-makers, business leaders and citizens of future society. Students in higher institutions therefore need to develop the skills and competences to live and work in climate-threatened future, an increasingly globalized world and sustainability-oriented economy (Nyoni, 2009). The employee must have all what is expected from them by the industries. Having a higher degree can guarantee of getting a preferred and good job because higher education can develop employability among the students. A student must possess soft skill along with the subject knowledge. Several literatures related to employability have observed that there exists a gap between the need of the employer and skill levels of the students graduating from higher institutions.

For youth to cope with the growing complexity and uncertainty of global sustainability issues, often described as super wicked problems they require definite skills and competences, related to anticipatory thinking, systems thinking, frustration tolerance, diversity, strategic management and action, emotional intelligence, normative aspects and dealing with uncertainty (Wiek et al.; Levin et al. 2012; Rieckmann 2012; Ploum et al. 2018). With current transitions towards sustainable, green, bio-based, circular economic models and important transformations in job requirements and tasks,

the role of education and learning for sustainability in empowering young people is being increasingly emphasized (Stewart 2010; Wiek et al. 2011).

Today's higher education graduates will need to manage these transformations in their workplaces and future lives. Young people therefore need to be empowered through skills, knowledge and competences that enable them to contribute to the decisions, discussions and actions shaping their future career prospects and quality of life (Zoghbi and Lambrechts, 2019).

Therefore, it is important for educational institutions to have a working relationship with industry to meet the requirements and needs of the employers.

Literature Review

Mutalemwa (2021) reported that while several universities around the world have employed various initiatives and teaching and learning methods to embed the most in-demand skills into their degree programmes, Tanzanian universities remain to focus on promoting discipline specific content knowledge at the expense of generic skills required in the workplace which would have enhance graduates' employment prospects. Lettmayr (2012) submitted that countries around the world, grabbed long-term economic crises and face many complex challenges, which can be solved to some extent if they pay great amount of attention to nurture the education for the world of work.

Ali and Jalal (2018) investigated the relationship between higher education and employment, and the extent higher education predicts employment for students. They submitted that higher education is for world of work, that working world required more efficient and highly qualified person and higher education is a predictor of employment. More so, Betourel Zoghbi and Lambrechts (2019) opined that majority of the study participants highlighted weaknesses in the current way education prepares young people to manage real-world problems such as climate change. They stressed further that the prevalent disconnected thinking amongst the public, which they considered to have been shaped by educational

approaches do not promote systemic and critical thinking among young learners.

Trivedi and Sharma (2023) reported that most of the time, the problem is not the availability of the job, but the mismatch or lack of skills to carry out a particular job. They suggested various ways to enhance employability of youth such as revamping of curriculum, skill-based education, employability assessment and training, soft skills and measurement of institutions in terms of outcome among others. Also, Katundu and Gabagambi, (2016) and Wakkee et al., (2017) reported that entrepreneurship education in Tanzania suffers from lack of more practical approach to entrepreneurial education, rote learning and dearth of knowledge concerning sources of funding and support for people who choose to pursue the entrepreneurship path. Anderson (2017) as cited by Mutalemwa (2021) submitted that Tanzanian graduates were however complained of the lack of applicability of theoretical content taught by the university.

Chuma, (2017) and Policy Forum (2018) reported that Tanzanian graduates were not able to adequately meet the expectations of the world of work because the curriculum does not adequately provide for professional career guidance and counseling services. Subramanian (2017) submitted that there is a clear picture of the serious gaps in the requirement of skill sets for employment, which unfortunately is not gained through higher education system. He suggested for the review of higher institutions curriculum.

Theoretical Framework

Capital -Labour Complementarity Theory

According to Milgrom and Roberts (1990), the term 'complement' is used not only in the traditional sense of a specific relation between pairs of inputs but also in a broader sense as a relation among group of activities. Lindbeck and Snower (2003) further elaborate on the idea of factor complementarity, which is identified as a central element in the determination of a firm's boundaries, distinguishing among four types of complementarities: two kinds of inter-factor complementarity (technological and informational complementarity), intra-factor complementarities (leading to

increasing returns to scale) and complementarities among factors in the production of additional products (leading to increase returns to scope). In this study, our theoretical analysis is restricted to inter-factor complementarities.

As technology advances, labour productivity increases and just like the case of an increase in capital, the economy's production possibilities expand. Similarly, the case of an increase in capital, the new technology increases the real GDP that each quantity of labour can produce by increasing the marginal product of labour and by extension the demand for labour (Mathew, Powell and Parkin, 2005). The implication of this is that new technology will lead to increase in employment as a result of increase in marginal product of labour and GDP in the short term. However, as wages increase (labour is assumed to be paid the value of its marginal product); more labour that can be absorbed will be supplied. This pushes wages down and eventually leads to unemployment. Secondly, unemployment will result from displaced workers who lack the required skills for the new technology. This is more like other factors other than wages (in this case technology) determining demand for labour. Theoretically, this will cause a downward shift in demand curve with a new equilibrium settled eventually at a lower quantity of labour and wages.

Statement of Problem

Over the decade, it seems that the higher education institutions are not preparing their undergraduates for the labour market. As a result of economic crises in Nigeria, many people lost their jobs, companies were shut down, and this eventually led to mass unemployment in the country. Thus, higher number of children graduated from secondary schools yearly leading to unprecedented high intake into Nigerian Universities. Learning in Nigeria is theoretical which was based on memorization and does not provide the capacity to students to prepare them for world of work.

The planning of these universities did not influence the job market for the graduates, this suggests that there is rising unemployment amongst graduates from these faculties due to the inability of the planning system to meet up with student's and job market demands. Previous studies focused on political, socio-

economic and implications of unemployment, benefits and essence of sustainability with little attention on higher education, employability and sustainability. Thus, this study investigated higher education and sustainable development in the 21st century: implications on youth employability.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate Higher Education and Sustainable Development in the 21st Century: Implications on Youth. The specific objectives are to:

1. examine the link between university education and the world of work.
2. assess student's confidence on university education.
3. ascertain the relevant of university curriculum to the world of work.
4. evaluate ways of enhancing employability of youth.

Research Questions

The following questions were raised to guide the study

1. What is the link between university education and the world of work?
2. What is the student's confidence on university education sustainability?
3. Are University curricula relevant to the world of work?
2. What are the various ways of enhancing (sustaining) youth employability?

Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey research. The population consists of all higher institutions and students in Oyo State. Three higher institutions and 150 undergraduates were selected from each institution through simple random sampling technique. A total of 450 participants were used. The instrument used for this study was questionnaire; data collection and collation were based on questions raised through Assessment of "Higher Education and Youth Employability Questionnaire" (HEYEQ) which was used to collect relevant information on the Higher Education and sustainable

development implications on youth employability. Each of the items has response options ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (DA).

The validity of the instrument was guaranteed by subjecting it to thorough scrutiny by experts in relevant fields. The reliability of the instrument was ascertaining using Cronbach Alpha and reliability Coefficient was found to be 0.75. The instrument was administered and collected by the researcher. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics, Simple percentage was used to answer the four research questions.

Analysis of Results

Answering Research Questions

Research Question 1: What is the link between university education and the world of work?

Table1: Percentage of respondents on the link between university education and the world of work

| S/N | ITEMS | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|----|------|-----|------|-----|------|---|
| | SA | % | A | % | D | % | SA | % |
| 1. | I have good knowledge about the requirement of future career | | | | | | | |
| 110 | 24.4 | 73 | 16.2 | 206 | 45.8 | 61 | 13.6 | |
| 2. | I must get a job that is appropriate to my academic discipline | | | | | | | |
| 96 | 21.3 | 85 | 18.9 | 148 | 32.9 | 121 | 26.9 | |
| 3. | There is a link between my academic pursuit and my future work | | | | | | | |
| 102 | 22.7 | 46 | 10.2 | 223 | 49.6 | 79 | 17.5 | |
| 4. | I have decided on which job I will apply for after my graduation | | | | | | | |
| 131 | 29.1 | 88 | 19.6 | 132 | 29.3 | 99 | 22 | |
| 5. | I chose my academic discipline because of its strong link to the labour market | | | | | | | |
| 51 | 11.3 | 63 | 14.0 | 315 | 70.0 | 21 | 4.7 | |
| 6. | I do worry about my future career | | | | | | | |
| 243 | 54.0 | 98 | 21.8 | 81 | 18.0 | 28 | 6.2 | |
| 7. | I enroll at the university not to seek for job after graduation | | | | | | | |
| 35 | 5.1 | 19 | 4.2 | 317 | 70.5 | 91 | 20.2 | |

Table 1 revealed that many students disagreed that they have good knowledge about the requirement of their future career (45.80% Disagree, 13.06% strongly disagree). A large number of students disagreed that must get a job that is appropriate to their academic discipline (32.09% Disagree, 26.09% strongly disagreed). It also revealed that students disagreed that there is a link between their academic pursuit and their future work (49.06% Disagree, 17.05% strongly disagree). The result further revealed that many students cannot decide on which job they will apply for after their graduation (29.30% Disagree, 22.00% strongly disagree). Majority of the students also affirmed and disagreed that they chose their academic discipline because of its strong link to the labour market (70.00% Disagree, 4.70% strongly disagree). The result also revealed that majority of students worried about my future career (54.00% strongly agree, 21.80% agree). The result further revealed that majority of the students disagrees with the statement that they enroll at the university not to seek for job after graduation (70.50% disagree, 20.20 strongly disagree).

Research Question 2: What is student's confidence on university education sustainability?

Table 2: Percentage of respondents on Student's confidence on university education sustainability

| S/N | ITEMS | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|---|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|
| | SA | % | A | % | D | % | SD | % |
| 1. | My university education offers me opportunities to compete for jobs in my country and outside my country | | | | | | | |
| 56 | 12.4 | | 73 | 16.2 | 214 | 47.6 | 107 | 23.8 |
| 2. | My university education qualifies me to pursue any future work | | | | | | | |
| 34 | 7.6 | | 115 | 25.6 | 163 | 36.2 | 138 | 30.7 |
| 3. | I will get a job appropriate to my discipline | | | | | | | |
| 39 | 8.7 | | 112 | 24.9 | 189 | 42 | 110 | 24.4 |
| 4. | I am afraid because my university education has no value on the labour market | | | | | | | |
| 95 | 21.1 | | 122 | 27.1 | 147 | 32.7 | 86 | 19.1 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|--|----|------|----|-----|-----|-------|-----|------|
| 5. I prefer to work in private sector than in public sector | 27 | 06 | 06 | 1.3 | 176 | 39.16 | 241 | 53.6 |
| 6. My university education qualify me to get job immediately after my graduation | 58 | 12.9 | 72 | 16 | 258 | 57.3 | 62 | 13.8 |

Table 2 revealed that many students disagreed that university education offers them opportunities to compete for jobs in their country and outside their country (47.60% disagree, 23.08% strongly disagree). A large number of students disagreed that their university education qualifies them to pursue any future work (36.20% Disagreed, 30.70% strongly disagreed). It also revealed that majority of the students may not get a job appropriate to their discipline (42.00% Disagree, 24.40% strongly disagree). The result also revealed that many students were afraid because their university education has no value on the labour market (32.70% disagree, 19.10% strongly disagree). Majority of the students agreed to work with public sector (39.16% disagree, 53.60% strongly disagree). The result also revealed that majority of students disagree with the statement my university education qualifies me to get job immediately after my graduation (57.30% disagree, 13.80% strongly disagree).

Research Question 3: Are University curricula relevant to the world of work?

Table 3: Percentage of respondents on relevance of university curriculum to the world of work

| S/N | ITEMS | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|-----|------|----|-----|----|-----|
| | SA | % | A | % | D | % | SA | % |
| 1. | Lack of many skills during my university education did not prepare me for the world of work | | | | | | | |
| 198 | 44 | | 217 | 48.2 | 32 | 7.1 | 01 | 0.2 |
| 2. | The curriculum does not include more practical that prepare me to fit future careers | | | | | | | |
| 261 | 58 | | 169 | 37.6 | 17 | 3.8 | 03 | 0.6 |
| 3. | There is no relationship between what I study and the | | | | | | | |

| requirement of labour market | | | | | | | |
|---|------|-----|------|----|------|----|-----|
| 99 | 22 | 275 | 61.1 | 65 | 14.4 | 11 | 2.4 |
| 4. I must go for training after my graduation | | | | | | | |
| 123 | 27.4 | 249 | 55.3 | 77 | 17.1 | 01 | 0.2 |
| 5. Entrepreneur courses I learnt in my university were theory | | | | | | | |
| 249 | 55.3 | 196 | 43.6 | 05 | 1.1 | - | - |

Result from table 3 revealed that lack of many skills during their university education did not prepare most of these students for the worlds of work with 44.00% strongly agreed and 48.20% agreed respectively. The table further revealed that the curriculum does not include more practical that prepare them to fit future careers 58.00% strongly agreed, 37.60% agree. sThe result also revealed that majority of the students agreed that there is no relationship between what they studied and the requirement of labour market 22.00% strongly agreed and 61.10% agreed respectively. Majority of the students agreed that they must go for training after their graduation 27.40% strongly agreed and 55.30% agreed respectively. A large number of students agreed that entrepreneur courses they learnt in their university were theory (55.30% strongly agreed, 43.60% agreed).

Research Question 4: What are various ways of enhancing (sustaining) youth employability?

Table 4: Percentage of respondents on various ways of enhancing (sustaining) employability

| S/N | ITEMS | | | | | | | |
|-----|--|-----|------|----|-----|---|----|---|
| | SA | % | A | % | D | % | SA | % |
| 1. | Career guidance should be an important part of curriculum | | | | | | | |
| 167 | 37.1 | 249 | 55.3 | 34 | 7.6 | - | - | - |
| 2. | Review of higher institutions' curriculum | | | | | | | |
| 222 | 49.3 | 210 | 46.7 | 18 | 4.0 | - | - | - |
| 3. | Inclusion of hard and soft skills in the curriculum | | | | | | | |
| 152 | 33.7 | 295 | 65.6 | 3 | 0.7 | - | - | - |
| 4. | Creating a learning environment which develops students' employment related attributes | | | | | | | |

| | | | | | | | |
|---|------|-----|------|----|-----|---|---|
| 277 | 61.6 | 173 | 34.4 | - | - | - | - |
| 5. University curriculum should be matched with job market | | | | | | | |
| 129 | 28.6 | 304 | 67.6 | 17 | 3.8 | - | - |
| 6. The curriculum should be planned according to employers needs and students' aspiration | | | | | | | |
| 325 | 72.2 | 113 | 25.1 | 12 | 2.7 | - | - |

Result from table 4 revealed that majority of the students agreed that career guidance should be an important part of curriculum with 37.10% strongly agreed and 55.30% agreed respectively. The result also revealed that students agreed that higher institution curriculum should be reviewed with 49.30% strongly agreed and 46.70% agreed. The result further revealed that hard and soft skills should be included in the curriculum with 33.70% strongly agreed and 65.60% agree. The result also revealed that the students agreed with creating a learning environment which develops students' employment related attributes with 61.60% strongly agreed and 34.40% agreed respectively. Majority of the students agreed that University curriculum should be matched with job market with 28.60% strongly agreed and 67.60% agreed. The result also revealed that majority of students agree that the curriculum should be planned according to employers needs and students' aspiration with 72.20% strongly agreed and 25.10% agreed respectively.

Discussion of Findings

The result from table 1 revealed that there was a little link between university education and the world of work in Nigeria. Majority of these students did not have good knowledge about the requirement of future career, how to get appropriate job related to their academic discipline, there is no link between their academic pursuit and their future work and their academic discipline has no strong link to the labour market.

The result of the finding is in line with Subramanian (2017) who submitted that there is a clear picture of the serious gaps in the requirement of skill sets for employment, which unfortunately is not gained through higher education system. He suggested for the review of higher institutions curriculum. Also, Chuma, (2017) and Policy

Forum (2018) reported that Tanzanian graduates were not able to adequately meet the expectations of the world of work because the curriculum does not adequately provide for professional career guidance and counseling services.

The result from table 2 revealed student's confidence on university education, the findings revealed that university education did not offers them opportunities to compete for jobs in my country and outside my country, university education did not qualify them to pursue any future work, it cannot offer a job appropriate to their discipline and university education did not qualify me them to get job immediate after my graduation.

This finding reflects the opinion Trivedi and Sharma (2023) who reported that most of the time, the problem is not the availability of the job, but the mismatch or lack of skills to carry out a particular job. The findings of the study revealed the relevant of university curriculum to the world of work. The findings discovered a lot of deficiencies which makes the curriculum not relevant to the world of work such as lack of many skills during university education that can prepare students for the world of work, the curriculum does not include more practical that prepare students to fit future careers, no relationship between what they study and the requirement of labour market and entrepreneur courses learnt in universities were theory.

This finding reflects the opinion of Betourel Zoghbi and Lambrechts (2019) who opined that the prevalent disconnected thinking amongst the public, which they considered to have been shaped by educational approaches do not promote systemic and critical thinking among young learners. The findings also reflect the opinion of Anderson (2017) as cited by Mutalemwa (2021) submitted that Tanzanian graduates were however complained of the lack of applicability of theoretical content taught by the university.

The findings further revealed various ways of enhancing youth employability such as career guidance should be an important part of curriculum, review of higher institutions' curriculum, inclusion of hard and soft skills in the curriculum, creating a learning environment which develops students' employment related attributes, University curriculum

should be matched with job market and that curriculum should be planned according to employers needs and students' aspiration.

The study corroborates the work of Trivedi and Sharma (2023) who suggested various ways of enhancing employability of youth such as revamping of curriculum, skill-based education, employability assessment and training, soft skills and measurement of institutions in terms of outcome among others. The findings also reflect the opinion of Katundu and Gabagambi, (2016) and Wakkee, Hoestenberghé and Mwasalwiba, (2017) who reported that entrepreneurship education in Tanzania suffers from lack of more practical approach to entrepreneurial education. In corroborate with this finding Subramanian (2017) suggested for the review of higher institutions curriculum.

Conclusion

It has been established that one of the numerous challenges among youth in Nigeria is employability. After graduation, there has been various limitations in making the transition from acquired education and training to the world of work. They show higher rates of unemployment than older generations. Unemployment of graduates is affected by a wide range of factors such as psychological factors, social, economic and political. Also, employability skills were pointed as a vital tool for accomplishment in the workplace. Majority of these students did not have good knowledge about the requirements of future career, how to get appropriate job related to their academic discipline because there was little link between university education and the world of work, students did not have confidence on university education and curriculum is not relevant to the world of work. Entrepreneurship education which could have given the graduates chance of self-employment or job opportunities is purely theory without details of applied which would enhance self-development.

Recommendations

Base on the findings the following recommendations were made:

- There should be urgent need to the review of higher institutions' curriculum because the present university

curriculum contains a lot of courses that are not relevant to the labour market.

- Career guidance should be an important part of curriculum,
- There should be an inclusion of hard and soft skills in the curriculum.
- There should be creation of learning environment which develops students' employment related attributes.
- University curriculum should be matched with job market and that curriculum should be planned according to employers needs and students' aspiration.
- The curriculum should include more practical that can prepare graduates to fit future careers.
- Entrepreneurial education should be of more practical than theoretical.

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