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THE NEXUS OF EMPLOYERS DEMANDS AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS IN OYO STATE NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS ON JAPA SYNDROME

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Abstract

This study examines the required employability skills and how important is such employability skills to an employer of labours in Oyo State, Nigeria. Two research questions were answered. The study adopted the sequential mixed methods research design. The multi-stage sampling procedure was used in this study. The economic sectors were stratified into seven sectors in Ibadan Metropolis. 20 employers of labour were selected from each sector using a convenience sampling technique. A total of 140 employers were used for the study. 10 human resources managers were purposively selected as Key informants for interview sections using an interview guide. Two validated instruments of reliability of 0.75 and 0.78 respectively were used to collect the data. Quantitative data were analysed using the descriptive statistic of frequency count, percentage, mean, and standard deviation while qualitative data were content analysed and thematically interpreted. The results obtained revealed that employers strongly agreed that communication, Information Communication and Technology, Problem-Solving, Analytical, Personality, Adaptability, Team Work, and Leadership skills were essential for graduates to have in order to be employable. It can therefore be inferred that the possession of a certificate is only to attest to the fact that someone has been trained in formal settings. Job seekers should display good communication skills, organisation skill, creativity, teamwork, planning, and so on, which are in high demand by the employers of labour. Among others, some recommendations were made that the management of various educational institutions should put more emphasis on experiential learning to gain practical experience through service learning, internships, volunteer work, teaching practice, or part-time jobs to expose learners to

¹. Introduction

Graduate unemployment has been a continual challenge in most societies due to graduates' inability to meet up with the current expectations of the labour market. Qualified human resources with high competitiveness and employability skills are needed to face the era of technological disruption. More so,

employability skills in terms of, organisation skill, creativity, teamwork and, planning. Also, counselling section should be put in place to re-orientate the graduate on Japa syndrome among others.

Key words: Unemployment, Experiential learning, Employers, Employees

employability skills are very important in the current job market. Employers look for candidates with a range of skills beyond technical knowledge. These skills include communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and leadership which is highly valued by employers. These skills help ensure that employees can work collaboratively, manage their time effectively, and solve problems in a timely and efficient manner. By developing these skills, individuals increase their chances of getting hired and advancing in their careers.

However, employers find a lack of expertise among job seekers. According to Padi and Musah (2022) employers in Ghana frequently view recent university graduates as lacking the fundamental abilities to accomplish straight forward everyday tasks, giving the impression that certification is merely a formality rather than a sign of achievement. In addition, Lysenko and Wang (2022). notes that the lack of transferrable skills among graduates is an issue in the employment of university graduates in the United States of America. Also, it is reported that employers in the United Kingdom are generally content with some basic abilities (basic literacy, numeracy, and IT) but are relatively dissatisfied with regard to the issues of digitalization in the labour market and marketization in higher education (Kornelakis & Petrakaki, 2020).

Nigeria is not an exception to these hydra-headed issues of unemployment as a country. Nigeria's unemployment rate was predicted to hit 37% in 2023 (Nigeria Economic Summit group, 2023). In the year prior, a 32.5 percent projection for this figure was made. Chronological data demonstrate that over the past few years, the jobless rate in Nigeria increased steadily. Over 40 million young people in Nigeria are qualified to work, yet only 14.7 million of them are completely employed, and the remaining 11.2 million are unemployed (Nigeria Economic Summit group, 2023). Instead of being empowered, they have been reduced to a group of disgruntled individuals, many of whom have turned into political thugs and destructive agents in the hands of the nation's enemies. Both governmental and commercial organizations in Nigeria have criticized the caliber of university graduates produced by Nigerian universities and the need to devote significant amounts of financial and human resources to recently hired graduates in order to get the required results. According to Abe and Kasumu (2022), graduates from Nigeria's private and public colleges are not considered employable due to lowered standards, deteriorating infrastructure, and a lack of employability skills. This makes it alarming to learn that hiring them is discouraged by both public and private organizations. This is because it costs more for firms to train and keep employees who will fit into their organizational structure.

Furthermore, their profit margin is significantly impacted by the significant resources used in the training programmes. This may help explain why most banks, educational institutions, telecommunications companies, and manufacturing firms choose to hire diploma or certificate holders who will receive minimal training and cheap pay to maximize profit. University graduates are ill-prepared for the labour market, according to studies by Gbadamosi and Omosunlade, 2022; Balogun, 2022; Gbadamosi, 2021). This is because there is a mismatch between the education and training (undergraduate programmes) offered by universities and the job openings that are available. Adebakin, Ajadi, and Subair, (2015) reported that there appears to be a discrepancy between the capabilities needed and those that graduates from Nigerian

universities possess. Abe and Kasumu (2022) concluded that there is a gap between the capability university graduates possess and those required by labour companies. In turn, this has led to a large number of underemployed or unemployed recent graduates.

The high percentage of unemployment in Nigeria has also caused a major emigration of young people to other nations, a phenomenon now known as "Japa" (). The term "Japa," which means "to go to greener pastures" in Yoruba, is still frequently running errands in the disgruntled thoughts of Nigerian young. According to reports, the majority of young people migrating from countries in the Global South to Europe and other nations in the Global North are from Nigeria (Shahara Reporter, 2023; Ikuteyijo, 2020). According to Ikuteyijo's study from 2020, the majority of young people who relocated illegally did so for economic reasons and were influenced by social media and family dynamics. According to the paper's conclusion, Nigeria is currently experiencing a severe brain drain as a result of young people's perception of "Japa" as a means of escaping the country's challenging economic climate. In addition, reports show that some Nigerians who have left the country for foreign countries like the UK, and France amongst others ended up jumping from frying pan to fire as some do not have pre-requisite skills to fit into the job markets (Shahara Reporter, 2023; Ikuteyijo, 2020).

Several efforts were therefore put in place to address the problems such as Learning visits, internships, the introduction of entrepreneurial education, and teaching practice in form of direct professional experiences that students have while pursuing their studies (Balogun, 2022). The Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS), the National Employment Policy, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), the National Youth Development Agenda, the National Development Plan, the National Poverty Eradication Program (NAPEP), the National Youth Policy, the Nigerian Youth Employment Action Plan (NIYEAP), Subsidy Reinvestment, and other policy initiatives have all been implemented outside of schools in Nigeria (Enwuru & Gbadamosi, 2022; Onyeike, & Onyeagbako, 2014). Despite the fact that only a small number of these initiatives were successful, the majority had little to no impact on Nigeria's unemployment rate. As a result of the upsurge in the menace of unemployment. This study therefore investigates the types of and demand for employability skills among the stakeholders.

This study is anchored on human capital theory. Human capital theory suggests that individuals who possess valuable skills, knowledge, and experience are more likely to earn higher wages and have greater job security. Employability skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability are highly valued by employers and can help individuals improve their human capital, making them more desirable to employers and increasing their chances of success in the workforce.

2. The problem

In recent times, there has been a demand for new employability skills due to the rising unemployment rate. The patterns have increased the demand on institutions of higher learning to reflect more systematically on how employable skills may be incorporated into the curriculum. Studies have reported that there is a mismatch between what employers need and what universities offer the job market. However, it seems little or no studies have been carried out in the Ibadan metropolis to examine the opinion of employers of labour on the demand for employability skills. This study, therefore, examines the required employability skills and how important is such employability skills to an employer of labours in Ibadan.

3. Research Questions

1. What employability skills do employers of labour demand from their employees?
2. How often do employers of labour demand employability skills from their employers?

4. Methodology

The sequential mixed methods research design was employed for this study. The descriptive survey design was greatly concerned with the given detailed description of an event as it appeared, with the absence of manipulation of what brought about the event, or what is being observed. While the qualitative design is to was chosen because it enabled the researcher to have an in-depth interview with the key informants to complement the data from the questionnaire and to capture areas that the questionnaire might not have adequately captured. The population of this study comprised all employers of labours in Oyo State while the target population was employers of labour at the Ibadan metropolis. The multi-stage sampling procedure was used in this study. The economic sectors were stratified into seven sectors in Ibadan using Federal Government Survey (2019). 20 employers of labour were selected from each sector using a convenience sampling technique. A total of 140 employers were used for the study. 10 human resources managers were purposively selected as Key informants for interview sections using an interview guide.

Employability Skills Types and Demands Questionnaire (ESTDQ) ($r = 0.75$) consists of two sections. Section A deals with the respondents' demographic information while Section B covers employers' perceptions on types and demands of employability skills. The instrument was rated on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 points, Agree (A) = 3 points, Disagree (D) = 2 points, and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point. Employers' Demand for Employability Skills was rated on a four-point rating scale of Always (A) = 4 points, sometimes (S) = 3 points, Rarely (R) = 2 points, and Never (N) = 1 ($r = 0.78$). The descriptive statistic of frequency count, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, and the weighted mean was used for proper presentation and analysis of the proposed research questions collected response data.

5. Results

Gender Distribution of Employers

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Employer

Gender of Employer	Frequency	%
Male	78	65.00
Female	32	35.00
Total	20	100.00

Source: Fieldwork 2022

Both male and female employers were included in the study. Male respondents were 78 (65.0%) while female respondents 32 (35.0%) as presented in table 1.

Table 2: Distribution of Employers of Labour based on Sectors

Sectors	Frequency	%
Education	20	14.30
Construction	20	14.30
Agribusiness and agro-allied industries	20	14.30
Banking	20	14.30
ICT and Digital Jobs	20	14.30
Real Estate	20	14.30
Wholesale and retail trade	20	14.30
Total	140	100.00

Source: Fieldwork 2022

Table 3 presents the information on sectors of the employers. Education, construction, Agribusiness and agro-allied industries, Banking, ICT and Digital Jobs, real estate, and Wholesale and retail trade had the same percentage (14.30%) each.

Research Question 1: What employability skills do employers of labour demand from their employees?

Table 4: Types of Employability skills that Employers Demand from Employees

S/N	Statements	SA f(%)	A f(%)	D f(%)	SD f(%)	X	Std. Dev	Rank
1.	Employers demand graduates who can make decisions on their own.	21 (70.0)	9 (30.0)	-	-	3.70	.466	2
2.	Employers place value on graduates' communications manner.	14 (46.7)	16 (53.3)	-	-	3.47	.507	11
3.	Employers demand graduates who are proficient and fluent in speaking.	19 (63.3)	11 (36.7)	-	-	3.63	.490	4
4.	Employers can employ graduates without the ability to efficiently and effectively work as a team.	2 (6.7)	2 (6.7)	14 (46.7)	12 (40.0)	1.80	.847	13
5.	Employers demand graduates who portray the ability to plan ahead and adhere to fore plans.	26 (86.7)	4 (13.3)	-	-	3.87	.346	1

6.	Employers demand graduates who have several leadership experiences.	20 (66.7)	10 (33.3)	-	-	3.67	.479	3
7.	Employers demand graduates who have a minimum of basic practical knowledge of information technology (ICT).	18 (60.0)	11 (36.7)	1 (3.3)	-	3.57	.568	6
8.	Employers demand for graduates who can use at least one system application, such as MS-word, MS-excel MS PowerPoint, Corel-draw and Photoshop.	15 (50.0)	15 (50.0)	-	-	3.50	.509	9
9.	Employers demand for graduates who can analyse compound concepts and resolve rigorous concepts.	15 (50.0)	14 (46.7)	1 (3.3)	-	3.47	.571	11
10.	Employers don't necessarily want graduates who have the ability to detect the root cause of a problem.	1 (3.3)	2 (6.7)	8 (26.7)	19 (63.3)	1.50	.777	14
11.	Employers demand graduates who are flexible and can easily adapt to work conditions.	19 (63.3)	11 (36.7)	-	-	3.63	.490	4
12.	Employers demand graduates who have the ability to manage and resolve conflicts.	17 (56.7)	13 (43.3)	-	-	3.57	.504	6
13.	Employers demand graduates who show forth some level of honesty, integrity, and personal ethics.	17 (56.7)	12 (40.0)	-	1 (3.3)	3.50	.682	9
14.	Employers demand graduates who have confident and show high self-esteem.	16 (53.3)	14 (46.7)	-	-	3.53	.507	8
15.	Employers demand graduates who exhibit the ability to multi-task and handle several work issues.	18 (60.0)	12 (40.0)	-	-	3.60	.498	5
	Weighted Mean	3.34						
	Criterion Mean	2.50						

Source: Fieldwork 2022

Key: SA - Strongly Agree; A - Agree; D - Disagree; SD - Strongly Disagree f - Frequency; % - Percentage; Std. Dev – Standard Deviation

Table 4 is the presentation of employers' views on employability skills expected employers possess. The information in the table depicts that various skills are expected to be possessed by university graduates. These skills include Communication skills (items 2, 3); Information Communication and Technology skill (items 7, 8,); Problem-Solving and Analytical skills (items 1, 5, 9, 10, 12); Personality and Adaptability skills (items 11, 13, 14, 15); Team Work and Leadership skills (items 4, 6). All the statements in the table (except the negative statements) are above the average mean of 3.34 which is an indication that employers strongly agree that all the skills are essential for graduates to have in order to be employable.

In order to get more information on employability skills that employers of labour demand from their employees, some employers of labour were interviewed, and some of their views were stated below.

Qualitative Reports

Response: "We have soft skills and hard skills. However, possession of a Certificate is only to attest to the fact that someone has been trained in formal settings. Job seekers should display good communication skills, organisation skills, creativity, teamwork, and, planning. In short, employability skills are numerous". (Male, an administrator)

"In the contemporary world, we employers are more into soft skills than hard skills. For instance, we examine how communicative you are, your ability to think out of the box, and being creative among others". (Female, a proprietress)

Research Question 2: How often do employers of labour demand employability skills from their employers?

Table 5: Employers of labour demand of employability skills by Frequency

Statements	A f(%)	S/N S f(%)	R f(%)	N f(%)	Mean	Std. Dev
1. I demand skills from graduates which are outside the subject area of study in Higher Education.	24 (80.0)	5 (16.7)	1 (3.3)	-	2.77	.504
2. I place less importance on graduates' actual degree discipline in favour of the generic skills which they have acquired.	9 (30.0)	18 (60.0)	2 (6.7)	1 (3.3)	2.17	.699
3. I see graduate's achievements related to the subject discipline as necessary but not sufficient for them to be recruited.	16 (53.3)	10 (33.3)	3 (10.0)	1 (3.3)	2.37	.809
4. I see graduate level of education as what make them eligible to apply for a job.	18 (60.0)	9 (30.0)	3 (10.0)	-	2.50	.682

5.	I view employability or soft skills as the 24 building blocks of graduates' career. (80.0)	5 (16.7)	1 (3.3)	-	2.77	.504
Average mean					2.52	

Source : Fieldwork 2022

Key: A - Always; S - Sometimes; R - Rarely; N - Never f - Frequency; % - Percentage; Std. Dev – Standard Deviation

The result of findings on the perception of the employers of labour on students' employability skills is presented in table 5. The result revealed that most employers always demand skills from graduates who are outside the subject area of study in Higher Education (M= 2.77; SD=0.504). Also, most employers always view employability or soft skills as the building blocks of graduates' careers (M= 2.77; SD=0.504). Most of the employers also indicated that they always see the graduate level of education as what makes them eligible to apply for a job (M= 2.50; SD=0.682) and also see graduate's achievements related to the subject discipline as necessary but not sufficient for them to be recruited (M= 2.37; SD=0.809). While the majority of the responding employers indicated that they sometimes place less importance on graduates' actual degree discipline in favour of the generic skills which they have acquired (M= 2.17; SD=0.699). Overall, the average mean of 2.52 implies that employers of labour sometimes demand their employees to display employability skills despite their qualifications.

In order to get more information on how often employers of labour demand employability skills from their employees, some employers of labour were interviewed, and some of their views were stated below.

Qualitative report

Response: "I don't think an employer will employ anyone without these Employability Skills because if an employer does, the employer will not be able to achieve the vision and mission of that organization".
(Female, a proprietress)

"There are set goals and objectives which are necessary to accomplish in any organisation, If there is no competent hand to drive the vision or mission of the organisation, those goals and objectives may not be achieved. In fact, I can't compromise adequate display of communication skills, logistic skills, presentation skills, and organisation skills among others in my school. (Male, Human Resource Manager)

He further says " Knowledge is not enough because, in a secular world, we need wisdom. Wisdom is the ability to apply the knowledge one has acquired. In the same thing, these skills we are talking about are the ability to apply the knowledge you got in the four walls of the classroom. In fact, the success of any organisation depends on the quality of its employees. (Male, an administrator)

6. Discussion of the Findings

Types of Employability skills that Employers Demand from Employees

Based on the findings, the skills expected from university graduates by employers are; communication skills, information communication and technology skills, problem-solving and analytical skills, personality and adaptability skills, and teamwork and leadership skills. This finding ascertained that employers of labours affirm the above as necessary skills needed for graduates to be employable. This goes along with the findings of Balogun (2022); Lysenko and Wang, (2022) who explain that employability skills' is an umbrella term for a set of highly desirable, transferable skills that turn you into a very attractive candidate or employee. They can be defined as a set of skills employers want from a potential employee. There are various employability skills such as problem-solving, oral communication, adaptability, collaboration or teamwork, resource management, organizational skills, written communication, technology use, information use, and certain personality traits (Gbadamosi; Jacobi & Pillay, 2022). Employability skills are pivotal to job seekers and undergraduate students are expected to have been equipped with employability skills related to their field of study to a significant level.

How often do employers of labour demand employability skills from their employees

Moreover, the outcomes of findings from the second research question which reveals the perception of the employers of labour on students' employability skills confirmed that employers of labours have more interest in the employability skills of job applicants than their actual graduating degree grade. They always perceive graduates' employability skills as the building blocks of their career and needed attributes that will make them contribute positively to the employer's enterprise positively. Hence, it could be said that employability skills are needed by graduates to become distinctive and attractive applicants for employment. This finding tallies with the findings of Asuquo and Inaja (2013) which reveals that in today's world employers are demanding skills from graduates who are outside the subject area of study in Higher Education. Indeed, some employers have placed less importance on graduates' actual degree discipline in favour of the more generic skills which they have acquired. These skills are highly valued by employers, as they help to ensure that employees are able to work collaboratively, manage their time effectively, and solve problems in a timely and efficient manner (Onyeike, & Onyeagbako, 2014; Ikuteyijo, 2020). Therefore, employers generally see a graduate's achievements related to the subject discipline as necessary but not sufficient for them to be recruited. Achievements outside the boundaries of the discipline of extracurricular activities such as work experience, volunteering, and involvement in clubs and societies are seen as having equal importance in this context as the knowledge and experience acquired through academic study.

7. Conclusion

Employability skills are very important and in high demand in the current job market. Employers demand candidates who possess a range of skills beyond just technical knowledge. This implies that employability skills are very important to employers, as they help to ensure that employees

are able to perform their roles effectively and contribute to the success of the organization. These skills include communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability, and leadership. By developing these skills, individuals increase their chances of getting hired and advancing in their careers and thus improve productivity.

Policy implications of the findings on Employability and “Japa” Syndrome

Stakeholders in education such as government, and university administrators may need to provide support for individuals with Japa syndrome including focusing on the development of employability skills that are in high demand by employers, such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, and adaptability. Support should also include counseling to reorientate youths on the dangers of migration, especially irregular immigration. Another way is that higher institutions should put more emphasis on experiential learning to gain practical experience through service learning, internships, volunteer work, teaching practice, or part-time jobs. Universities should collaborate with the industry in the training of prospective employees while they are in school so that they can be exposed to the required employability skills. Finally, the individual graduate should develop an interest in continuing education and professional development that can help graduates stay up-to-date with the latest industry trends and technologies.

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