

Embedding Employability Skills Within Higher Education Institutions: The Future of Study in Nigeria

DR. ABE, EZINNE CHIDINMA¹, DR. KASUMU, YINKA REBECCA²

^{1, 2} *University of Port Harcourt, Faculty of Education, Department of Curriculum Studies and Educational Technology. Uniport. Rivers State, Nigeria.*

Abstract- This paper sought to examine the possibilities of embedding employability skills within higher education institutions, with a focus on Nigerian Universities. In achieving this, five concepts and one theory were reviewed to seek how relevant employability skills are towards fostering individuals to becoming capable citizens that can contribute their quota towards the attainment of a development that is sustainable in the economy. It was found out that the acquisition of employability skills by individuals does play a vital role on the rate of attainment of sustainable development in the economy but it is not well-imparted in some Nigerian Universities the accrued rise in unemployment rate of graduates in the economy. It was then concluded that the impartation of employability skills into graduates of Nigerian Universities is of necessity towards ensuring that they are actually capable of contributing their quota in the economy as well as the reduction exercise of unemployment rate of graduates in Nigeria and so should be taken into serious consideration. It was suggested that administrators of Nigerian Universities should endeavor to work hand-in-hand with authorized agencies that can help foster the promotion of employability skills induction in their respective schools. It was also suggested that Government, NGOs, and other concerned authorities should endeavor to contribute their quota of provision of revenues towards ensuring that there is a successful impartation exercise of employability skills to undergraduates of Nigerian Universities.

I. INTRODUCTION

There are different strata of people in every economy; there is the working class (those who have something to do in this context) and the non-working class (which are seen as those that do not have what to do in this context). The extinguishable ratio between these two

types of people in the economy is relatively high, with the latter category accounting for the majority of the population in the economy, particularly in Nigeria. It is not encouraging to see, based on several surveys, that the population has shifted to the non-working class, among whom are graduates who are said to have completed their duties in their respective fields of specialization. This prompted the question, "Why such occurrences, in terms of what and what is lacking in these said graduates that has made them unemployable?" This is primarily due to these graduates lacking the necessary skills that ensure their employability by employers from various organizations throughout the country.

Although there are other factors that may contribute to the continuous rise in the unemployment rate of graduates in Nigeria, the central focus of this paper is on the employability skills possessed by these graduates, the lack of which renders them unemployable. This insight then led us to wonder what role Nigerian universities are playing in ensuring that their graduates are found to be employable by the numerous organizations that exist in the country. This can thus be referred to as the proper grooming of these graduates during their undergraduate days in their respective schools, because educational institutions are thought to have reformative abilities capable of refining individuals into acceptable citizens of the country capable of contributing their quota to society. According to Teichler (2007), the relationship between Higher Education and the world of work now tends to emphasize popular issues such as the contribution of educational expansion to economic growth, the dangers of technological advancement, and so on.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- Self-Efficacy Theory by Albert Banduras (1977)
Albert Bandura (1977), a Canadian-American psychologist and professor at Stanford University, coined the term "self-efficacy."

In his own words, he first proposed the concept as a personal assessment of "how well one can execute courses of action required to deal with prospective situations" (1977).

Self-Efficacy refers to a person's specific set of beliefs that determine how well one can carry out a plan of action in hypothetical situations (Bandura, 1977). To put it simply, self-efficacy is a person's belief in their own ability to succeed in a given situation. Bandura popularized the term, but psychologists have studied self-efficacy from a variety of perspectives.

To illustrate another point of view, Kathy Kolbe, an educator and best-selling author, believes that believing in one's own abilities is critical in measuring cognitive strength (2009).

She believes that self-efficacy also entails determination and perseverance, as it aids in overcoming obstacles that would otherwise prevent one from utilizing one's innate abilities to achieve goals.

According to Albert Bandura (1977), people develop their self-efficacy beliefs by interpreting information from four major sources of influence:

1. Mastery Experience (Performance Results)

The interpreted result of one's previous performance, or mastery experience, is the most influential source. When we talk about Mastery experiences, we mean the experiences one has when they take on a new challenge and succeed at it. The most influential source is mastery experiences. Practicing is one of the most effective ways to learn a new skill or improve one's performance in a given activity. How can one be certain that practicing and learning new skills will result in mostly positive outcomes? In most cases, part of the reason this works so well is that people unknowingly teach themselves that they are capable of learning new skills throughout the process.

This positive way of thinking – believing that one is capable of completing tasks set out for themselves – is a boon because part of the struggle of getting better at anything or learning something new is ensuring that the person believes they are capable of completing said task successfully.

2. Vicarious Experiences (Social Role Models)

The vicarious experiences provided by social models are the second most important source of self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1977), "seeing people similar to oneself succeed through sustained effort raises observers' beliefs that they, too, possess the capabilities to master comparable activities to succeed."

Observing other people successfully complete a task is an example of vicarious experience.

When one has positive role models in their life (particularly those who demonstrate a healthy level of self-efficacy), one is more likely to absorb at least a few of those positive beliefs about oneself.

Older siblings, older friends, camp counselors, parents, aunts and uncles, grandparents, teachers, coaches, and employers are all examples of social role models.

3. Social Persuasion

Receiving positive verbal feedback while undertaking a complex task persuades a person to believe that they have the skills and capabilities to succeed. Self-efficacy is influenced by encouragement and discouragement pertaining to an individual's performance or ability to perform (Redmond, 2010). For example, if one were telling an elementary school child that they are capable of achieving greatness and that they should set out to achieve anything their heart desires - this would be how verbal persuasion looks in action.

Verbal persuasion works on any age, but the earlier it is administered the more it is likely to encourage building of self-efficacy.

4. Emotional and Physiological States

A person's emotional, physical, and psychological well-being can influence how they feel about their

personal abilities in a given situation. For example, if you are suffering from depression or anxiety, it may be more difficult to maintain a healthy level of well-being. Is it possible to develop self-efficacy while dealing with some of these difficulties? Of course not, but increasing one's self-efficacy is a lot easier when one is feeling healthy and well (Bandura, 1982).

According to Bandura (1977), "what matters is not the sheer intensity of emotional and physical reactions, but how they are perceived and interpreted." People with a strong sense of efficacy are more likely to see their state of affective arousal as an energizing facilitator.

III. IMPLICATION

Albert Banduras' Self-Efficacy Theory helps to solidify the need for individuals to actually possess one or two skills that can thus term them to be employable in organizations by putting a strong emphasis on the various outcomes to be looked out for when actualizing the acquisition process of attaining employability skills. It emphasizes the major requisite features of the skills acquisition process that are required for the checkmating of relevant skills for the pursuit of economic survival.

IV. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

- Employability Skills

In order to be considered employable in terms of efficiency in ensuring the productivity of any organization that is currently recruiting, certain requisite skills must be possessed by the group of individuals clamoring for such employable opportunities. These necessary skills can be referred to as employability skills because they tend to determine an individual's rate of employability in an economy. According to the American Management Association (AMA), in today's global economy, employability skill attributes such as critical thinking and problem-solving, creativity and innovation, collaboration, and communication skills are becoming increasingly important.

These are the skills that employers expect from their employees in order for them to determine that the sole reason for their recruitment exercise, which is based

on the organization's continuous production ability in order to ensure their sustenance through the economy, can be fully obtained with the set of individuals that are presented before them who are likely to become one of their employees. Employers' primary concerns today are finding and training qualified employees. According to Robinson (2000), employability skills are the fundamental abilities required for obtaining, retaining, and performing well in a job. These are the abilities, attitudes, and behaviors that allow workers to get along with their coworkers and supervisors and make sound decisions.

Employability skills, unlike occupational or technical skills, are generic in nature rather than job specific, and they apply to all industry types, business sizes, and job levels ranging from entry-level to senior-most. Robinson (2000) also discusses how, in order to become a valuable employee, one must think critically, act logically, and be able to evaluate situations in order to make decisions and solve problems.

There is no organization in Nigeria that does not have goals and objectives in place to re-establish the primary goal for which it was founded. For organizations to perform or function as efficiently as expected, there must be a classification of duties in a hierarchical format, with each phase of the hierarchy having its own set of responsibilities.

- Requisite Employability Skills by Employers

The shift in the last decade from a manufacturing to a service-based economy has had an impact on the importance of soft skills for graduate employability in general. Because of the increased complexity of newly developed applications, the majority of development work is performed by teams of developers. As a result, interpersonal and social interaction skills, as well as the ability to work in a team-based environment, are critical. These new developments lead to a different understanding that graduates should have soft (or non-technical) skills in addition to technical skills (Ilana & Aharon, 2013). Graduates must possess and demonstrate both technical and non-technical or soft skills in order to have a successful career (Gillard, 2009). It was, for example, for project managers.

Furthermore, due to the rapid development of new technologies in the computing discipline, they are expected to be able to learn and apply new technologies. Furthermore, they must be able to work in groups, as computer applications have become too complex for a single programmer to handle (Hazzan & Kramer, 2007), and the majority of applications are developed in teams. Business and industry require IT competencies that include both technical and non-technical skills (Ilana & Aharon, 2013).

Technical abilities are related to professional methodologies for requirements elicitation and analysis, system design, human computer interface design, software validation and verification, software quality, and software development and implementation. Non-technical skills, also known as soft skills, are human-related activities such as communication, teamwork, collaboration, planning, subject leadership, presentation delivery, writing skills, and work evaluation. Many employers value both technical and non-technical skills equally and seek professional employees who possess both types of skills (Bailey & Stefanizk, 2002; Noll & Wilkins, 2002).

Some essential employability skills are listed and discussed briefly below:

- Problem-Solving and Decision-Making Capabilities

A problem is defined as any difference between the current situation and the desired situation. Problem-solving is the process of identifying a gap between an actual and desired state of affairs and then taking action to correct the deficiency or capitalize on the opportunity. Decision-making, on the other hand, is a selection process in which one of two or more possible solutions is chosen to achieve the desired goal (Huitt, 1992).

- Teamwork Capabilities

Teams are made up of individuals with a variety of characteristics. Teamwork is a collaborative process that enables ordinary people to achieve extraordinary outcomes [29]. Working collaboratively in groups is synonymous with teamwork. When people work together in groups, they (1) have a shared collective identity, (2) have common goals, and (3) are interdependent.

- Communication Abilities

Communication is the process by which a message is delivered and received by the other party between two or more people. Every day in the workplace, managers give workers direction, coworkers communicate to plan a project, and employees communicate information to customers. One of the employability skill attributes required for a graduate's success in the workforce is the ability to communicate. A job candidate with good communication skills may be chosen over the candidate with poor communication skills (Crawford, Lang, Fink, Dalton, & Fielitz, 2011).

- Relevance of Skill Acquisition

In today's economy, skill acquisition is critical. This is due to an individual's ability to actively participate in ensuring the growth and development of the economy in which he or she finds himself or herself. Thus, skill acquisition can be said to be both directly and indirectly linked to the rate of development of any economy. In recent years, there has been a greater emphasis placed on the importance of employability skills. Employability skills are a set of essential abilities that entail the development of a knowledge base, level of expertise, and mindset that is becoming increasingly important for success in the modern workplace (Cassidy, 2006; Yorke, 2006). Employability skills are commonly regarded as essential qualifications for many job positions and, as a result, have become essential for an individual's career.

Employability skills have emerged as a critical issue in the national, regional, and international labor markets. One missing link between education and training and the world of work is considered employability skills. The labor market, as one of the driving forces of educational content and quality, places a high value on international recognition of qualifications and education (Suarta, Suwintana, Sudhana, & Hariyanti, 2017). As it is rightly stated, "A literate society is a developed society," and literacy in this context is very broad and cannot be limited to having passed through the four walls of an educational institution. There is clearly a need for individuals to be literate in a variety of contexts, one of which is the possessions of some.

- Challenges of Skill Development in Nigerian Universities

Universities, as the nation's knowledge industry, increase the labor force's productive capacity. University scientists in developed countries can monitor global technological trends, assess their relevance to national needs, and aid in the development of national technological capacity for economic growth (Adeyemo, Ogunleye, Oke & Adenle 2010). However, observations suggest that employment opportunities for graduates are influenced not only by the employment system and its requirements, but also by quantitative structural skill linkages. It has also been observed that in many countries, the perspectives and reputation of specific institutions and departments influence the employability of their students. As a result, some institutions of higher learning attempt to maintain a higher competitive edge for their graduates by incorporating various professional experiences during the program.

The observation is that employers' expectations vary and are difficult to predict due to the numerous factors that influence the need for recruitment or the recruitment requirement. Employers' perceptions of the reputation of certain institutions and departments can sometimes influence recruitment; as a result, some institutions of higher education try to ensure a higher competitive edge for their graduates by establishing some direct professional experiences during the students' course of study (learning visits, internships) (Adeyemo, Ogunleye, Oke & Adenle 2010). Universities are responsible for more than just academic skills when it comes to student training. It should include disciplining individuals by instilling in them desirable human characteristics such as honesty, hard work, and loyalty.

- Ways by which Nigerian Universities can Impart Employability Skills on their Graduates

Universities, among other things, are established to produce manpower because higher institutions of learning play an important role in every society (Onyeike & Onyeagbako, 2014). The university not only receives products from previous tiers, but it is also the final destination for formal teaching and learning before the ultimate entry into the world of employment or entrepreneurship (Onyeike &

Onyeagbako, 2014). According to UNESCO (1998) in Basse and Basse (2011), higher institutions of learning are expected to play a critical role in promoting sustainable economic, social, and cultural development as role models of innovation and change at large.

This implies that educational institutions are at the forefront of positively and powerfully contributing to society. A university is one of the tertiary institutions that exist in almost every country around the world for specific purposes. Universities exist in Nigeria to pursue some primary and secondary mandates (Onyeike & Onyeagbako, 2014). The primary mandate is to train people to obtain degrees, while the secondary mandate is to provide community services. For any nation to be economically buoyant, politically stable, and culturally appreciable and marketable, the university bears the unwavering responsibility of producing skilled graduates for the country's productive vibrancy in all economic endeavors (Onyeike & Onyeagbako, 2014).

CONCLUSION

Based on what has been discussed thus far, it can be concluded that the instillation of employability skills in graduates of Nigerian universities is essential for ensuring that they are capable of contributing their quota to the economy as well as the reduction of the unemployment rate of graduates in Nigeria, and should thus be taken seriously.

SUGGESTIONS

As a result of the foregoing conclusion, it is recommended that:

1. Administrators of Nigerian Universities strive to collaborate with authorized agencies that can aid in the promotion of employability skills induction in their respective schools.
2. The government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other relevant authorities should strive to contribute their fair share of revenue to ensuring the successful impartation of employability skills to undergraduates at Nigerian universities.
3. Undergraduate students should also make themselves available for skill acquisition programs

that will help them increase their level of expertise in the outside world.

4. Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should also organize employability skills acquisition programs or schemes for graduates who are falling behind in this regard.

REFERENCES

- [1] Adeyemo, S.A., Ogunleye, A.O., Oke, C.O., & Adenle, S.O. (2010). A survey of factors determining the employability of science and technology graduates of polytechnics and universities in the Nigerian labour market. *Journal of Science and Technology Education Research, October 2010*; 1(5): 99-106.
- [2] American Management Association (AMA), (2010). *Executives say the 21st century requires more skilled workers*. <http://www.p21.org/news-events/press-releases/923-executives-say-the-21st-century-requires-more-skilled-workers/>
- [3] Bailey, L. & Stefanizk, G. (2002). Preparing the information technology workforce for the new millennium. *ACM SIGCPR Computer Personnel, 2002*; 20(4): 4-15.
- [4] Bassey, S.U. & Bassey, U.U. (2011). *Management of Higher Education in Africa*. Abaam Publishing Co.
- [5] BusinessDictionary.com. (2017) *Employability skills*. <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/employability-skills.html>
- [6] Cassidy, S. (2006). Developing employability skills: Peer assessment in higher education. *Education + Training, 48(7)*: 508-517.
- [7] Crawford, P., Lang, S., Fink, W., Dalton, R., & Fielitz, L. (2011). *Comparative Analysis of Soft Skills: What is Importance for New Graduates?* Association of Public and Land-grant Universities.
- [8] Gillard, S. (2009). Soft Skills and Technical Expertise of Effective Project Managers. *Issues in Informing Science and Information Technology, (Online)*, 6: 725. Available: <http://iisit.org/Vol6/IISITv6p723-729Gillard599.pdf>
- [9] Hazzan, O. & Kramer, J. (2007). Abstraction in Computer Science & Software Engineering: A pedagogical perspective. *System DesignFrontier Exclusive Frontier Coverage on System Designs, 2007*; 4(1): 6-14.
- [10] Huitt, W.G. (1992). Problem-solving and decision making: Consideration of individual differences using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. *Journal of Psychological Type, 24*: 33-44.
- [11] Ilana, L. & Aharon, Y. (2013). Soft Skills – An Important Key for Employability in the "Shift to a Service Driven Economy" Era. *International Journal of e-Education, e-Business, e-Management and e-Learning, October 2013*; 3(5): 416-420.
- [12] Kozłowski, S., & Ilgen, D. R. (2006). Enhancing the Effectiveness of Work Groups and Teams. *Psychological Science, 7*: 77-124.
- [13] Noll, C.L. & Wilkins, M. (2002). Critical skills of IS professionals: A model for curriculum development. *Journal of Information Technology Education, 2002*; 1(3): 143-154.
- [14] Onyeike, V.C. & Onyeagbako, S.O. (2014). Enhancing Employability through University Education: The Role of National University Commission (NUC). *Global Journal of Educational Research, 2014*; 13: 109-115.
- [15] Robinson, J.P. (2000). What are employability skills? *The workplace, September 2000 (ACES, 2000)*; 3(3): 1-3.
- [16] Suarta, I.M., Suwintana, I.K., Sudhana, I.G.P.F.P., & Hariyanti, N.K.D. (2017). Employability skills required by the 21st-century workplace: a literature review of labour market demand. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research, 102*: 337-342.
- [17] Yorke, M. (2006). *Employability in higher education: What it is – What it is not*. The Higher Education Academy.