Students Perception of Labour Market Expectations and Challenges of Unemployment in Universities in Calabar Geo-Political Zone

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Abstract

Tertiary institutions must prepare young people for the world of work and avoid being two focused on ‘obsolete’ entrance requirement. The study focused on student’s perception of labour market expectations and challenges of graduate unemployment in Calabar Geo-political zone, Nigeria. One thousand two hundred and eighty six (1286) final year students constitute the population. Stratified and purposive sampling techniques were adopted. Labour market expectations and challenges of graduate unemployment questionnaire were used. A reliability estimate of 0.51 and 0.63 was determined using Cronbach alpha estimate. Pearson product moment correlation statistics was used for data analysis. The result shows that student’s perception of labour market expectations in terms of graduate preparedness, skill oriented curriculum significantly relate to challenges of unemployment. The recommendations were that institutions of learning, educational stakeholders, government and curriculum planners need to develop a nurturing curriculum on the current labour market needs based on relevant and employable skills in universities as this will go a long way to solve the problem of skills mismatch in our society.

Keywords: Labour market expectations, unemployment and skill oriented curriculum

Introduction

One major problem that has almost assumed incurable status in Nigeria today is unemployment. It is next to corruption in terms of its pervasiveness. A recent united nations statistics shows that Nigeria’s unemployment rate rose to 27.1% of the workforce by the end of march 2020, up from 23.1% in 2019 (National Bureau of statistics 2019). This statistics showed that only about eight (8) percent of fresh Nigerian graduates are able to secure good jobs after the National youth service while about 12% make do with jobs that could hardly earn them a good living. The remaining 80% are said to be in unemployment market, with no job to make a living. Unlike in the old days of the oil boom when university graduates were hot cake in the labour market, when holders of mere secondary school certificates and teachers training colleges were toast of many employers of labour. Today, unemployment situation in Nigeria leaves much to be desired.
Everywhere you go to in the country the story is the same with the preponderance of “no vacancy” strategically and conspicuously placed at the entrance gates of companies and offices. The metropolitan cities are the most affected. Just as the economic vagaries have made cities and states in the country a mecca of some sorts for destitute and beggars, the toll of unemployment has made many fresh graduates relocate from their immediate environment to some cities like Calabar metropolis, Port Harcourt cities, Abuja and Lagos which they considered to be more economically viable. It is common to find some graduates still roaming the streets five to ten years after graduating in search for jobs that are either not there or for which they are not qualified.

This lamentable milieu of graduate unemployment has therefore given rise to alternative culture and redefined the country’s value system. While many roam the streets looking for jobs, others have become glorified taxi and bus drivers; refuse disposers or okada riders at best. Many others have sought solace in drug abuse, armed robbery, cultism, and political thug, advance free fraud (419), prostitution, sex trafficking, alcoholism, youth restiveness, militancy and kidnapping (Nwosu, 2005).

Unemployment can be traumatic to the concerned and the family (fear, anxiety, aggression, frustration, psychological and financial stress), most at times, parents are unable to maintain the family, children from these homes are made to drop out of school and join the army of street traders to provide whatever income they can gather for the family. Nwosu (2005), revealed that unemployment appears to be linked to a greater incidence of crime and to a variety of afflictions including heart diseases, suicide and mental illness.

The question is, why do large number of university graduates goes jobless for months or even years, while businesses complain of lack of skilled workers? Why is it no labour policy to link education with labour market? Should institutions of higher learning reinvent their systems to empower the graduate to meet the changing needs of the economy, market and the expectations of the society? (Babalola, 2007).

As observed by Nwosu (2005), Nigerian educational system is such that does not prepare graduates for self-employment. It is in recognition of this assertion that the nature of unemployment in Nigeria is not easily amiable to the Keynesian prescription rather it is mainly due to what he called “foundational disequilibria”. This is because the problem comes from lack of proper skills expansion in the educational institutions, faulty curriculum and orientation. The Nigerian educational system unfortunately is still structured to prepare graduates for employment in an oversaturated labour market in which organizations or establishments in both public and private sectors of the national economy are cutting jobs while the concept of self-employment remained a novelty (Heplizibah-Awulor, 2013). Although the tertiary education system is only now trying to embrace entrepreneurial skills development to tackle problem of unemployment among graduates, the nature is still far from the ideal of education for employment that is knowledge for practical action. The present realities make this style of going to school in order to be employed after graduation no longer fashionable. The unemployment situation is worsening with every passing day. More so, as thousands of graduates are being churned out from tertiary institutions yearly to besiege those already hopelessly waiting for employment and roaming our streets searching for means of earning a living. For some years now, there have been a piled up of graduates upon graduates mortgaging the nation’s future and our children’s future for the greed, avarice and planlessness of our leaders through bad governance. To further buttressed this point, Edukugho (2012) stated that, the enormity of unemployment challenge which has become a colossal one, a socio-economic affliction of great proportions can be illustrated most vividly when out of the 13000 applications received by Dangote Group of Companies for Graduate executive Truck Drivers, there were (6) Ph.D, 704 Masters and over 8,460 Bachelor degree holders, (Emmanuel, 2012). The most astonishing was the fact that the company only needed 100 drivers but got 13000 applications, most of them from reputable universities.

The above situation has been traceable to the problem of funding and institutional failure. The inability of Nigerian universities to function effectively is the result of lack of inadequate investment in education over the years, Odigwe and Okoi (2018). Investment in education is an important element of
human endeavor that leads to human capital development, which produces skill and values embodied in individuals to stimulate resourcefulness and increase productivity. These inadequacies have resulted in the current face up between the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) and the Federal Government of Nigeria. The ASUU advocates that the recommendation of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO) that a minimum of 26% of the annual budget of member nations be allocated to education and be implemented in Nigeria. The situation is presently bad with all infrastructures in the system almost grounded; education has consistently received allocations far below the minimum 26% of national budget as recommended by UNESCO despite the phenomenal increase in the nation’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) since 2000. Adenipekun (2009) made it clear that over the years, the funding of tertiary institutions has been grossly inadequate because the allocation from federal and state government fell far short of what is actually required.

The Federal Ministry of Education (2006) in consultations with employers of labour discloses that large number of university graduates go jobless due to the following reasons. Labour supply problems which include: a mismatch between teaching in our institutions and the needs of the labour market, lack of consultation with private sector has leads to teaching of outdated curriculum, and resources. Lack of qualified teachers to teach vocational, innovative, entrepreneurship and job skills and low demand from private sector for poorly trained graduates from Nigerian universities has lead to increase in unemployment, Babalola (2007). Babalola added that institutional failure as a result of skill mismatch is a major concern in Nigeria tertiary education graduates who acquire skills that are not demanded by the labour market, especially with respect to areas of petroleum, gas, agriculture, manufacturing, solid minerals, tourism and ICT as identified in the education sector status report produced by Federal Ministry of Education in 2003. Nigerian society has the biased for some popular courses such as economics, law and medicine, which has resulted in skill mismatch. While it can be argued that unemployment amongst the better educated graduate is the consequence of institutional failures, the poor state of economic growth in the face of the growing population accounts for the worsening scenario of unemployment over the years.

According to Oni (2000) employers complain that graduates are poorly prepared for work. He reiterated that academic standards have fallen considerably over the past decade and that university degree is no longer a guarantee of communication commonly viewed as “half baked”. Everyone knows that standard of education in Nigeria has drastically fallen. Beside most educational institutions in the country have not tailored their programmes to meet the demand of the workforce. This has made their products ill-prepared for labour market. The crises in the Niger Delta region such as youth restiveness, militancy and kidnapping are champion by graduates who have no source of living as a result of unemployable skills, Nwosu (2005).

Unfortunately, nearly all the government of the federation gave the impression that anyone who has not been to a university cannot gain a worthwhile employment. Thus enrolments have been characterized by admission in excess of available places due to the presence of and demand for university education (FRN 2019). The general mood in the country given the extremely high rate of unemployment is that it is useless sending children to school when those with degrees are roaming the streets with their “pieces of papers”… a feeling among large section of the people that they are not wanted.

This scenario has constituted a source of worry to the government, parents and the unemployed. Education is an enterprise. There is nexus between educational attainment and economic improvement of the individual that is educated. This is why it has become imperative to establish the statistical base of graduate unemployment as well as labour market expectations in universities in Calabar geopolitical zone.
Literature Review

Employers of labour are devastated over the competency of the graduate who applies for every advertised job vacancy. Employers want graduates to be equipped with complimentary life skills such as reflective and critical thinking, problem solving skills, effective communication, integrity, good character, self-esteem, self-discipline organizing skills and ability to translate these into actions. The graduate of all disciplines need to know about market conditions both for their specific disciplines and in general, Anufuro (2013).

Maguin and Dench (2015) are of the opinion that labour market information is becoming more important for higher education institutions, and there is a growing need for information about regional and local areas, but in all of this there is a growing need for managers of higher institutions to explain how their own organization is adapting to such forces. They reiterated that employability of graduate has become a major issue and emphasizes the need for tertiary institutions to interpret and balance employer requirement. Labour market information is an important tool with which higher education institutions can understand employer’s requirement. Tertiary institutions and their students alike need better understanding of who the recruiters of the future will be, and their needs. It has become more important for institutions of higher learning to understand trends in graduate employment and utilizations with labour market information being a prime source of such intelligence, Odigwe and Okoi (2017).

The way in which new graduates are absorbed into the labour market has changed in recent times. James (2014) in his views observed that students learn academic core subjects which are useful and relevant but hardly equip them with the knowledge they need to fit into the place of work. James further emphasized that students need to be ready to meet specific employer’s needs. Higher education students are required to demonstrate workplace habits that employer prioritize such as punctuality, commitment, reliability and competition in high quality task and customer service.

Higher institutions of learning must prepare student for the world of work and avoid being too focused on “obsolete” college entrance requirements. It is on this note that Sadiq (2008) implores curriculum planners to make effort to study activities the people engage in and design a curriculum that will help them carry out these activities more effectively and efficiently. The acquisition of appropriate talent and skills through the appropriate implementation of skill-oriented curriculum in higher institutions of learning is critical for sustainable development and global competitiveness. Effort of curriculum planners toward this direction will revolutionize the competence of graduate in higher institutions with resultant creation of various employment opportunities and wealth generation (Nnadi, 2012).

Okoi, Ovat and Igbineweka (2013) posit that there is need to identify the skills that the graduates need to close the gap between unemployment and the unemployable. They added that it is necessary to build employability into curricula of tertiary institutions. Agbeyeku (2007), Brown (2000) and Essien (2012) emphasized significant graduate preparedness with quality curriculum at all levels will prepare Nigerian youth to be responsible and enterprising individuals who will become entrepreneurial thinkers in order to contribute to economic development and sustainable communities. This is necessary because the value system where everyone wait on government or private company to employ them after graduation from tertiary institutions no longer meet the yearning and aspiration of every Nigerian.

Statement of the Problem

The tertiary institutions in Nigeria have long enjoyed international respectability because of their high quality and standard of learning and for the sound quality of their graduates. This opinion has however shifted in recent times, the view that has gained currency in that erstwhile high standards are now falling and the graduates of the entire system are adjudged deficient in many skills expected of graduates.
Observations show that the graduate of tertiary institutions cannot fit into the current labour market such that despite acute shortage of skilled manpower, there is still very large-scale graduate unemployment. The rate of unemployment is on the increase in Nigeria with disappearance of the jobs in the public service and with the turning out of an estimated 130,000 graduates annually by Nigerian Universities. While it can be argued that unemployment amongst the better educated graduate is the consequences of institutional failures. The poor state of economic growth in the face of the growing population account for the worsening scenario of unemployment over the years.

University curriculum in Nigeria have been deficient in assuring a match between what the labour market requires and what university graduates bring to job situations. These conceptual calls for a look at paradigmatic issues of university curricula and associated issues which suggest new emphasis and new directions in curriculum development and revision for current and future demands of Nigerian labour market and the national economy at large. Skill mismatch is a major problem in Nigeria.

Objective of this Study
The purpose of this study is to find out the relationship between student perception of labour market expectation and graduate unemployment in Calabar geo-political zone of Cross River State, Nigeria.

Specifically, the study aimed at:
1. Ascertaining student’s perception of graduate preparedness in universities and challenges of graduate unemployment.
2. Determine student’s perception of skill oriented curriculum and challenges of graduate unemployment.

Statement of Hypotheses
1. Student’s perception of graduate preparedness in university does not significantly relate to graduate unemployment.
2. Student’s perception of Skill oriented curriculum does not significantly related to graduate unemployment.

Methodology
This study examined student’s perception of labour market expectations and challenges of graduate unemployment in universities in Calabar geo-political zone. The design was correlation design. The study population consisted of one thousand two hundred and eighty six (1,286) final year students of Cross River University of Technology (CRUTECH) and University of Calabar (UNICAL). Stratified and purposive sampling technique was used. The basis of stratification was ownership (state and federal). The sample size of five hundred and fifty students was purposely selected for this study. Three (300) hundred students were purposively selected from University of Calabar while two hundred and fifty (250) were selected from CRUTECH. Questionnaire titled: Labour Market Expectations and Challenges of graduate Unemployment (LMECGUQ)was designated for data collection. The questionnaire was sub-divided into 3 sections A, B and C. Section A was designed to elicit information from students base on demographic characteristics e.g (Age, sex level etc). section B was 12 item statement on graduate preparedness and skill oriented curriculum while section C was a 6 item statement on challenges of graduate unemployment. The likert-4-point scale was adopted. The scale range from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). A reliability estimate of 0.51 and 0.63 was determined using Crunbachalph estimate.
Result of the Study
The result of this study is presented in the following tables.

Hypothesis one
Student’s perception of Graduate preparedness does not significantly relate to graduate unemployment.

Table 1:  Pearson product moment curriculum analysis on the relationship between students perception of graduate preparedness and graduate unemployment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>r-value</th>
<th>r-table value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduate preparedness</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>15.14</td>
<td>1.87</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate unemployment</td>
<td>26.41</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R(550)=0.71, p<0.05

The result of this table shows that graduates preparedness statistically relate to graduate unemployment, r(550)=0.71, p<0.05. This support hypothesis one that is, effective graduate preparedness could reduce their unemployment.

Hypothesis two
Student’s perception of skill oriented curriculum does not significantly relate to graduate unemployment

Table 2:  Pearson product moment correlation analysis on the relationship between skill oriented curriculum and graduate unemployment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>r-value</th>
<th>r-table value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Skill oriented curriculum</td>
<td>550</td>
<td>16.18</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate unemployment</td>
<td>26.41</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

R(550)=0.68, p<0.05

The result of this table revealed that skill oriented curriculum significantly relate to graduate unemployment. R(550)=0.68, p<0.05. That is effective skill oriented curriculum could reduce graduate unemployment.

Discussion
Hypothesis one stated that students perception of graduate preparedness in universities does not significantly relate to graduate unemployment. The null hypothesis was rejected while the alternate hypothesis was retained. The result shows that graduate preparedness to the world of work is a prerequisite factor in reducing graduate unemployment. The result is in line with the findings of Anufuro (2013) who is of the view that graduate of all disciplines need to know about market conditions both for their specific disciplines and general. In support of this, Margin and Dench (2015) are of the views that employability of graduate has become a major issue and emphasizes the need for institutions of higher learning to integrate and balance employer requirement. Moreso, Odigwe and Okoi (2017) were of the views that tertiary institutions need to understand trends in graduate employment and utilization with labour market information as prerogative for graduate preparedness. James (2017) emphasize that students of higher institutions need to be ready to meet specific employers needs and also learn academic core subjects which will equip them with the knowledge they need to fit into the place of work. It is on this note that Sadiq (2008) conclude that curriculum planners...
should make effort to study activities the society engage themselves and design a curriculum that will enable them execute these activities effectively and efficiently.

The result of this study follow a challenge facing the Nigerian university system is to bridge the gap in knowledge, skills and attitudes of university graduates to meet labour market expectations. One way of bridging this gap is to determine the gaps in knowledge, skills and attitude of university graduates in order meet the expectations of employers of labour and needs of national economy. In many places, employers compensate for insufficient academic preparedness by organizing remedial courses, in-service training programmes for new employees. This increases the organizations costs and reduces their profitability and competitiveness. Therefore universities must prepare students for the world of work and avoid being focused on “Obsolete” university entrance requirement.

On students perception of skill oriented curriculum, the result also showed a significant relationship in the study. The result of the findings is in line with the findings of Okoi, Ovat and Igbine weka (2013) who are of the view that there is need to identify the skills that the graduate need to close the gap between unemployment and the unemployable. They also reiterated that there is need to build employability into curricula of tertiary institutions. In consonance with the learners, the strategies adopted should expose the learners to the acquisition of specific skills, knowledge and values. Thus, Nnadi (2012) emphasized that integrating entrepreneurship education in school curriculum in general and in tertiary institutions in particular is a way of putting our education on the desired pedestal of efficiency and functionality to meet the challenges of national needs and global competitiveness in the 21st century. Therefore entrepreneurship education will help the Nigerian youth to achieve the well cherished desire which is a transition from earn a living.

The findings of this study revealed that acquisition of appropriate talent and skills through appropriate implementation of skill-oriented curriculum in tertiary institutions is critical for the nation’s sustainable development and global competitiveness. Effort in this direction will revolutionized the competence of tertiary institutions graduate with relevant creation of various employment and wealth generation.

Conclusion
This study highlighted significant factors in curbing the challenges of unemployment in tertiary institutions in order to bridge the gap between education and the needs of the employers in our society. Therefore graduate preparedness and skill oriented curriculum are important in this regards.

Recommendations
The following recommendations were made:
1. University education should be geared towards addressing the unique problems and needs while responding to global trends.
2. There is need for educational planners to incorporate professional ethics and technical component to closely link theory with the world of work.
3. Institutions of learning, educational stakeholders, government and curriculum planners need to develop a nurturing curriculum on the current labour market needs, based on relevant and employable skills in universities as this will go a long way to solve the problem of skill mismatch in our society.
References