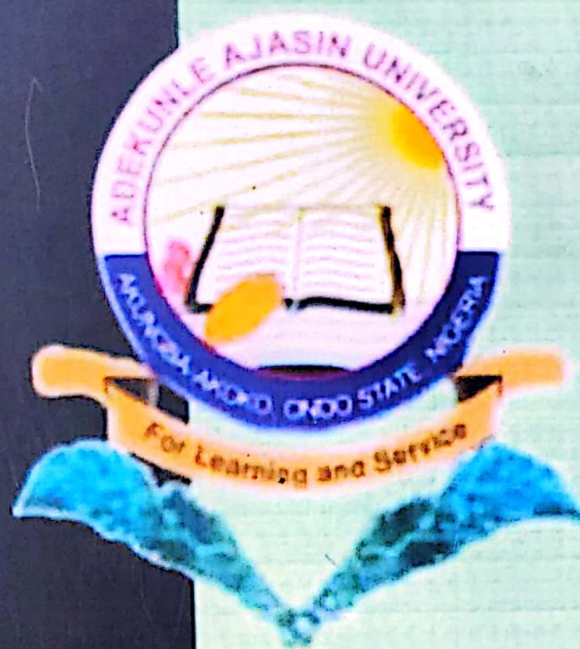




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INSTITUTIONAL-INDUSTRY COLLABORATION: A NIGERIAN RECIPE FOR DEVELOPING GRADUATES' EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

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Abstract

Institution-industry collaboration is an interaction between any higher education system and industry aimed at stimulating knowledge and technology exchange in order to boost the productivity of graduates. This type of interaction aims to bridge the gap between academic output and market needs. As a result, the study looked into institution-industry partnerships as a means of acquiring graduate employability skills in Nigeria. The study critically examines the concepts of institution-industry collaboration, employability skills, industrial needs, and graduate employment, as well as the aim of institution-industry collaboration and graduates' employability. The paper suggests that successful collaboration will provide favourable results and help tertiary institutions improve their academic programmes. The study suggested, among others, that higher institutions should engage with businesses and functional career management services to familiarize students with the components of employability skills from the start of their studies. This will also provide adequate assistance for their students' preparation for the workplace, with a particular focus on redesigning the programme's curriculum to provide real results.

Keywords *Institution-industry collaboration, graduate employability skills, development, Nigeria*

Introduction

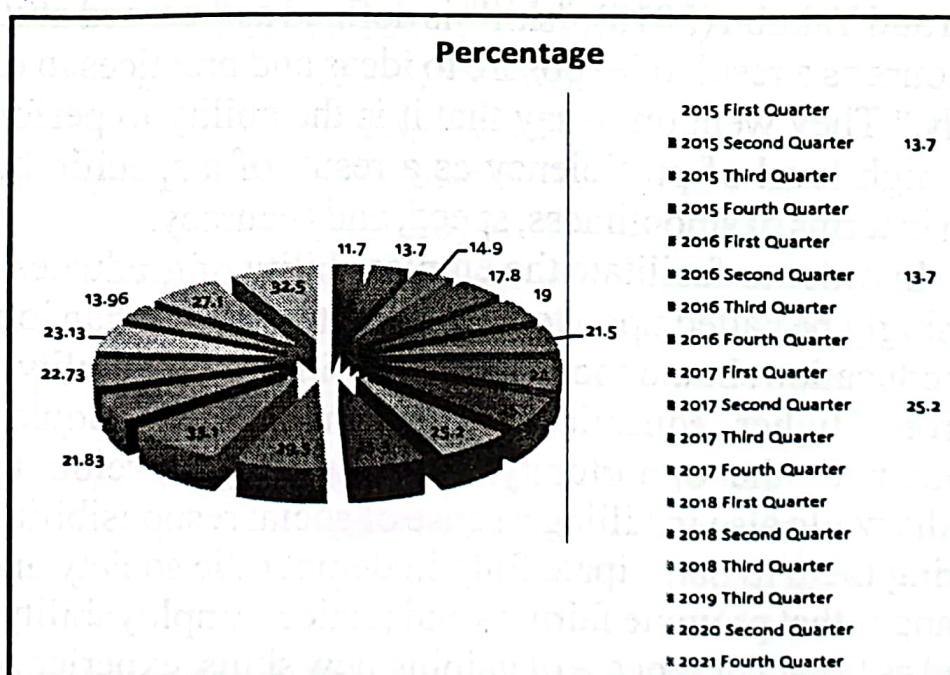
Nigeria's higher education institutions have recently reached a watershed moment as a result of the country's developmental improvements at all levels of education. It is well known for its role in creating high-level research and technology capacity in the knowledge economy. It does, however, serve an important role in generating professionals who will go on to work in a variety of fields, including health, education, and a variety of other services, as well as public administration. As stressed in the declaration of UNESCO's World Conference on Higher Education in 1988, the positive impact of higher education is not limited to those who directly study in universities, polytechnics, and schools of education, but can potentially radiate out across society (UNESCO, 2016). Governmental and educational roles in providing adequate and high-quality education to students throughout their studies will go a long way toward ensuring the acquisition of employable skills necessary for nation-building. The foregoing illustrates that education without working skills implies irrelevancy in the realm of labour.

Unemployment has been linked to the fact that the information gained in educational institutions does not attract those things that can lead to graduates finding decent jobs or becoming self-sufficient after graduation. Unemployment among graduates is defined as graduates who are qualified to work but are unable to find a job. The number of graduates who are unemployed has been steadily increasing, necessitating the improvement of employability skills among graduates. As a result, the current difficulties of youth unemployment in Nigeria can be addressed by adjusting the annual rate upward and gradually, as illustrated in the table below.

Table 1: Unemployment Rate in Nigeria 2015-2020

Year	Period	Percentage
2015	First quarter	11.7
	Second quarter	13.7
	Third quarter	14.9
	Fourth quarter	17.8
2016	First quarter	19.0
	Second quarter	21.5
	Third quarter	24.0
	Fourth quarter	25.0
2017	First quarter	25.2
	Second quarter	25.3
	Third quarter	29.5
	Fourth quarter	33.1
2018	First quarter	21.83
	Second quarter	22.73
	Third quarter	23.13
2019	Third quarter	13.96
2020	Second quarter	27.1
2021	Fourth quarter	32.5

Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/812300/youth-unemployment-rate-in-nigeria>

Figure 1
Unemployment Rate in Nigeria 2015-2021

Higher education and employability skills are based on the development of students' skills in relation to fields of knowledge and access that are linked to industry output (Aloysius et al., 2018). Higher education's goals and objectives are dependent on credible information being disseminated to prospective graduates in order to meet labour market demands. Individuals' employability skills are targeted at easing the transition of a new workforce into the workplace. Human resource development programs also improve employability skills by providing effective education and training to working, jobless, and underemployed people. This would assist students who are administered by various universities in learning vital employability skills and career growth.

Graduates have traditionally been able to find work, but globalization and rapid technological advancements have transformed the nature of work, requiring more flexible workers. In today's world, preparing students for a job in a higher education institution (HEI) is no longer sufficient; instead, they must be prepared to work in a dynamic global context (Éssilfie, 2014). These include the development of necessary skills and other important characteristics as demanded by the labor market among students. Graduates will be able to satisfy the demands of the new knowledge dispensation, which is defined by worker flexibility, which is highly sought after by employers (Boden & Neveda, 2010). According to Umoru and Yakubu (2018), "skill" is defined as "learned attitudes and behaviours as a result of exposure to ideas and practices in one's field of study." They went on to say that it is the ability to perform a task with a high level of proficiency as a result of a specific behavioral pattern in terms of smoothness, speed, and accuracy.

In order to facilitate the employability of graduates who will increasingly be called upon to be job creators rather than job seekers, higher education should focus on developing employability skills and initiative. Higher education institutions (HEIs) should provide students with the opportunity to completely develop their own strengths while also instilling a sense of social responsibility in them, preparing them to participate fully in democratic society and to push for changes that promote fairness and justice. Employability has been defined as the act or process of gaining new skills, experience, spoken

communication, on-the-job self-confidence, and a lower risk of losing one's ideas. Others see it as a lifelong process and a way to keep their jobs. University education is a type of education that emphasizes the teaching and development of practical skills rather than abstract or theoretical knowledge. Employability refers to the ability to improve and secure specific jobs through the use of knowledge, skills, and experience. If necessary, this can be found through the acquisition of a new job. It tests, evaluates, and determines an individual's competence on the job performance of a graduate who is looking for work or already has one.

The workforce in this era requires graduates with a variety of talents and traits that can fit in well with the context in which they find themselves, rather than only those with a high academic qualification as reflected by courses and degree classes. Graduates in today's technology age are frequently unprepared for the workplace due to a lack of generic skills that are demanded of them by employers. Lack of practical skills and experience, according to Jonck (2014), are contributing causes to the rising unemployment rate among graduates. As a result, it is critical to remember that colleges are responsible for producing skilled labor that is relevant to labor market needs; that is, they must provide opportunities for students to acquire knowledge and skills in order to deal with unemployment issues. Without a doubt, university education should focus on preparing students for the acquisition of suitable knowledge, skills, competencies, and attitudes that will prepare them for self-employment or paid work in any chosen vocation.

Despite the difficult academic exercise that the students have gone through, the rate of unemployment in Nigeria has not exhibited any form of association between the knowledge obtained and the production at the end of the academic activity. To support this, Udegbumam et al. (2018) asserted that hunting for a job in Nigeria is quickly becoming a job in and of itself. Despite the increase in the number of tertiary institutions, enrolment rate, and graduate turnout, Ameh et al. (2018) stated that graduate unemployment and underemployment, as well as their associated consequences (such as increased crime, unfulfilled dreams, suicide, and impaired financial position, among others), are posing significant challenges to many

developing countries, including Nigeria.

Nigeria's unemployment rate is currently at 32.5 percent, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2021). The NBS went on to say that these unemployed people now make a living by engaging in illegal activities such as kidnapping, robbery, bunkering, and other nefarious activities, demonstrating that the situation has resulted in poor moral youth empowerment as a contributor to corruption, internet fraud, sexual harassment by male sexual promiscuity (e.g. baby mama, sugar daddy, multiple sex partners), and other bad acts. This is due to Nigeria's lack of knowledge of the need for young empowerment, and as a result of the high rate of unemployment, people are forced towards corrupt practices. Unemployed people can use corruption to generate money and improve their lives. The youths, fathers, and mothers are seriously lamenting the negative impact of unemployment on the youths, which leads them into armed robbery, resulting in untimely death or life in prison when caught by the authorities.

Literature Review

Institution-Industry Collaboration

Institution-industry collaboration is a partnership between any part of the higher education system and industry with the goal of promoting knowledge and technology exchange to increase the quality of graduates' output. It is a term that refers to the connection, collaboration, cooperation, or exchanges that occur between higher education institutions and relevant sectors. Institution-industry collaboration, according to Omar and Samuel (2016), is a vehicle for enhancing innovation through knowledge exchange, while Natarajan (2014) stated that it is a form of partnership, co-sponsorship, interagency, or inter-organisational cooperation between educational institutions and industries. Administrators from both universities and companies are involved in collaboratively creating and monitoring programs or projects with the help of donated resources that will benefit both organisations. That is, the needs of the institution and the needs of industry are met through efficient interaction and means of enhancing university academic programmes. Notably, every university aspires to be recognized globally, especially in terms of

university rankings. As a result, universities are battling to meet worldwide standards.

The problem of institution-industry collaboration has risen to the top of higher education policymakers' agendas at both the national and institutional levels (International Institute of Educational Planning, 2000). (IIEP). This is a method of managing dependency that improves an institution's ability to meet its stated objectives. Since its inception, this system has provided numerous graduates with the option to participate in the SIWES programme, which has greatly helped them and improved and lowered unemployment rates. The story, however, is no longer the same. Suleiman (2018) backed up this claim when addressing the topic of SIWES failure among university freshmen at a stakeholders' meeting hosted by the National Universities Commission (NUC), emphasizing the importance of institutions collaborating with businesses. The Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme was developed by the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) in 1973 to address the problem of Nigerian graduates' lack of practical employability skills in preparation for employment in industry. Students are exposed to industry-based skills that are required for a smooth transfer from the classroom to the workplace. This provides tertiary students with the opportunity to become acquainted with and exposed to the necessary experience in operating machinery and equipment that are not available in educational institutions (Obanor & Kwasi-Effah, 2013). As a result, universities play a significant role in the success or failure of any institution, and this must be handled.

The goal of institution-industry collaboration is to establish a link between tertiary institutions and industry that will aid graduates in their professional training and development so that they may become knowledgeable in the workplace. Many industries have undoubtedly stated that graduates are not effectively trained, ill-equipped, or properly prepared and trained for industrial jobs, or that they are not well trained to benefit national growth (Odigbo et al., 2018). As a result, it is important to remember that one important part of educational output is graduates' employability. In addition, the objective of postsecondary institutions and individual employability skills is to prepare rising workers for success in the workplace.

Employability Skills

Employability skills have been defined as the act of gaining new skills, experience, speaking communication, on-the-job self-confidence, and a reduced risk to one's ideas. Others see it as a lifelong process and a way to keep their jobs. At the turn of the twentieth century, British economist William Beveridge developed the concept of employability for the first time. This was first presented from the standpoint of worker labour capacity, with a focus on the availability of mature workers in order to distinguish workers with greater labour capacity in the labour market. Hongjie and Zhenjia, Gazier et al. (2019) said that the employability development process is divided into seven stages based on its connotation. The first is the early twentieth-century dichotomy of employability, which focused on the opposite poles of employability and unemployability. In the 1950s, social-medical employability was the second human resource. The third is the 1960s manpower policy on employability. The flow of employability in the 1960s is the fourth. The fifth factor is employability in the job market in the late 1970s. The initiative's employability research, which was used at the business level as a human resource management tool, is the sixth. The interactive employability of the early 1990s is the seventh. This implies that the concept of employability has existed since the dawn of humanity. This has revealed how an individual's employability abilities evolve over time. Employability is a multidimensional notion that refers to an individual's ability to keep self-rewarding employment. It is used in employers' organisations as a human resource requirement for completing operational tasks in order to meet societal demands.

The ability of a graduate to possess and demonstrate the information, skills, traits, and attitudes required to get and maintain jobs in which they can be successful and fulfilled is known as employability skills. This is concerned with the learning of suitable abilities that students must possess in order to function well in the workplace. Employability skills are the fundamental abilities required for obtaining, maintaining, and excelling in a job. Communication, teamwork, problem solving, and decision-making skills, initiative and enterprising abilities, planning and organisation skills, and information and communication technology skills are all

talents that students need to learn (2018, Audu). Employability skills are set of skills, knowledge, and abilities that a person is expected to have in order to get, keep, and perform well on the job. Employability skills are the types of skills that assist an individual to carry out their job efficiently and effectively in the workplace.

Grill (2018) viewed employability skills as a combination of accomplishments, talents, understandings, and personal characteristics that make graduates more likely to find work and succeed in their chosen fields, benefiting themselves, their communities, and the nation's economy. This ability can assist graduates in realizing their employment goals as well as realizing their own social value and meeting social needs. As a result, it is the obligation of the institutions to work with the industries as well as a functioning career management service to familiarize students with the components of employability from the beginning of their studies. This will improve their performance after graduation, allowing them to handle the current labor market obstacles.

Students' employability skills have received so much attention that many countries throughout the world have devised a method for determining whether or not they are equipped with the necessary skills after graduation or prior to employment. The Conference Board of Canada, for example, has established a checklist of employability skills that will be required to enter, stay in, and advance in the current period (CBCES, 2000). Graduates of tertiary institutions must be trained and equipped with these abilities in order to effectively apply what they have learned in class and in the workplace.

Employers of labour are no longer satisfied with students who have only theoretical knowledge; instead, they seek students who have a high level of academic understanding. also those who can demonstrate the necessary talents and skills for workplace success This has made educators more aware of the quality of education provided to students and the impact of that education on students and society at large. People lamented the fact that higher education institutions allegedly produce half-baked graduates who lack the necessary employability skills when they enter the workforce. Due to technological advancement in the realm of labour,

this has been society's primary preoccupation. This claim was backed up by Olorunfemi and Ashaolu in Audu (2018), who stated that most Nigerian industries are concerned about the quality of graduates, citing low practical knowledge, a lack of skills required for the current technological edge, and a lack of confidence in their ability to carry out their responsibilities. Every citizen hopes that the kids generated will be able to work in any career that is related to their field of study in school. This is because, in this economic slump, employers are finding it harder to rely largely on academic products. This is demonstrated by their assertion that graduates are unprepared and lack the necessary abilities to fulfill the jobs that are offered to them based on the skills that students bring to society.

Conversely, based on the researcher's observations and interactions with some labour employers during the SIWES exercise, it was discovered that when students get hired, they will need to go through another set of training because the skills they learned in school will not allow them to fit into the job offered to them. It is obvious that the training obtained in school and the demands of labour companies are at odds. As a result, students must be equipped with the requisite corporate governance skills in order to work effectively in any firm where they may find themselves after graduation. As a result, instilling good employability skills in pupils will lower the rates of hazard, risk, uncertainty, and unemployment, among other things, lowering the rate of insecurity in Nigeria. The demand from companies for graduates implies that the institutions still have a lot of work to do in order to meet the industry's expectations.

According to Uchenu et al. (2019), tertiary education products in the twenty-first century appear to be skill deficient, lacking basic skills such as computer skills, vocational skills, communication skills, ethical skills, teamwork skills, entrepreneurship skills, personal management skills, and leadership skills, among others. According to Matic and Agusaj (2012), the alignment of industry requirements with higher education programs in transitional nations may help to raise society in general by assisting with employment and the provision of scarce skills. Furthermore, graduates must have adequate judgmental skills such as critical

thinking and problem-solving skills, creative and analytical thinking skills, information handling, communication skills, teamwork skills, technology application skills, autonomous learning skills, entrepreneurship skills, and cross-cultural understanding skills, to name a few. Furthermore, in order for the higher education sector to achieve acceptable levels of competitiveness, it must maintain relevance and accountability by keeping ahead of labor market requirements and adjusting curricula accordingly to enable effective human capital development through training (Wessels & Jacobsz, 2010).

The Goals of Institution-Industry Collaboration and the Employability Skills of Graduates

Collaboration and partnership between universities and industry to develop educational programmes that combine and integrate learning and the workplace, providing students with numerous opportunities to develop tactical information while at work, thereby improving their employability skills. Collaboration is essential not only because it is a more effective way to learn, but also because the spirit of collaboration pervades every institution and every person's life. As a result, learning to cooperate is an important aspect of preparing kids for success, problem-solving, innovation, and lifelong learning in a constantly changing networked economy (Uchenu et al., 2019). It also allows students to gain experience in the real world of business while also learning new skills. Interaction between higher education institutions and labor employers in industries serves to provide quality education training programs to the institution, bridging the gap between universities and industries.

Industrial Needs and Graduate Employment

Institution-industry collaboration allows students to connect skills and knowledge from many sources, as well as get experience applying theory to practice in a variety of contexts and learn work-related skills while enrolled in university. This allows students to perfect their professional knowledge and work-related skills throughout their university studies. As a result, students' work readiness improves and they are better prepared for the workforce. If

adopted globally, this collaborative system will inspire Nigeria's educational system to be more relevant, as well as prevent waste and economic slump. In addition, partnerships will bring industry and institutions closer together with the goal of improving educational quality, increasing workforce development, continuing education programs, and consulting, among other things. Collaboration between universities and industry is largely seen as one approach to improving innovation in the economy by facilitating the flow and utilization of technology-related knowledge and experience across sectors (Perk-mann, et al., 2011). Collaboration has two distinct characteristics: (a) UIC is an inter-organisational relationship instance that involves engagement between universities and organisations from the business sector to exchange tangibles, for example, funds, materials, and equipment, and intangibles, such as technology and data resources; (b) similar to cross-sector collaboration For example, partners typically have both individuals that are academic publishing for universities and technical problem-solving for industry and common objectives (for example, creating impact by providing solutions for society's problems) that drive their interest in collaboration. In this approach, knowledge is regarded as a tacit, context-related item rather than an explicit resource that can be codified and transmitted between organisations and that is formed by on-going social interaction between partners' actors during the collaboration's lifetime (Huggins et al., 2012).

Conclusion

In synopsis, successful institution-industry collaboration is required to meet the educational system's stated aims and objectives. Collaboration with industry has become a critical component in improving higher education quality, especially in the twenty-first century, when employers' perceptions of higher education graduates have shifted. There is a requirement for close connection with employers and participation in a variety of employer networks. Nonetheless, as a result of the foregoing, institution-industry partnerships will function as knowledge generators and reduce the country's graduate unemployment rate.

Suggestions

- ❖ Skills are required for students to compete in today's 21st century labour market. This paper, therefore, makes the following recommendations.
- ❖ Institutions should engage with industries and functional career management services to familiarize students with the components of employability from the beginning of their studies.
- ❖ Institutions should help their students' preparedness for the workplace, with a special focus on redesigning the program's curriculum to provide significant results.
- ❖ Practical courses should be given more weight than theoretical courses in order to prepare students for the problems of the labour market.
- ❖ In order for students to perform effectively in the labour market, they should be taught employability skills. Certificates without applicable skills are useless.
- ❖ To minimize Nigeria's unemployment rate, educational institutions should prepare to create more employable graduates in this administration.
- ❖ In general, higher institutions should revise their curricula to fit the needs of employers and industry to ensure that graduates are competitive in the workplace.
- ❖ In order to meet the needs of graduates' expectations in the current world, the curriculum planner should utilize the services of industry in curriculum planning.
- ❖ Employability skills should be included in the curriculum so that students can take advantage of a variety of efforts to acquire the skills they need.

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