

## UNDERGRADUATES' TRAINING EXPERIENCES AND EMPLOYABILITY IN IMO STATE

SHEU, A. L., OGUNJIMI, M. O. & POPOOLA, A. B.

### Abstract

*Modern economy needs highly trained and skilled man power and higher education institutions are required to produce qualified graduates to meet the needs of employers. This study therefore investigated undergraduates' training experiences and employability in Imo State. The study employed the survey research design, two (2) research questions and one (1) null hypothesis guided the study. A total of four hundred (400) respondents were selected for the study; 200 employers and 200 graduates of different disciplines. Two validated researcher designed questionnaire were used for data collection. The questionnaires were face and content validated, and reliability index were established at 0.73 and 0.68 using test re-test method. The statistical tools used for the study were mean and the Pearson's Product Moments Correlation. The research findings reveal employability competencies required by employers of graduate. It also reveals that undergraduates possess essential educational experiences that related to employability. In addition, the study reveals significant relationship between undergraduates' education experience and competencies required by the employers of labour. It was recommended that employability should be introduced as a course or unit of course to enhance graduates' employment prospect.*

### Introduction

Graduate according to Oxford Advanced learner's dictionary (2010) is a person who has a university degree. It implies a person that has the required attributes that are important for an effectively functioning society. It covers more than just "core skills", it encompasses knowledge, understanding, dispositions, attitudes and values (Godfrey, 1986). The level of quality of a graduate refers to their adequacy in terms of; self-confidence and self-skill, competence in communicating in the English Language, focus and commitment etc. Harvey and knight (1996) and Harvey and Green (1993) have argued that the quality of graduates can be broken down into five related dimension,

- Quality as exceptional (e.g. high standard)
- Quality as consistency (e.g. zero defects)
- Quality as fitness for purpose ( fitting required specification)
- Quality as value for money (as efficiency and effectiveness) and

- Quality as transformative (an ongoing process that includes empowerment to take action and enhancement of customer satisfaction)

Universities have the aim of producing fully functional graduate who not only serve in the workforce but must also be actively functioning member in their respective communities. The important role of university is to nurture the characteristics that help the graduates to function across all aspect of life. In other words, individual must not only be geared towards serving the sectors, but must also develop the skills that allow them to benefit their family; community and the nation (Finn 2000).

However, given the broad understanding of employability, it is important to recognize that the quality of a University graduate is not just a reflection of the quality of the curriculum and its supporting academic environment. It also reflects the demands of the industry as well as the competence of the regulating body in shaping the characteristics of higher education graduates (UNESCO 2012).

Modern economy needs highly trained and skilled human resources, and higher education institutions are required to produce qualified graduates to meet the needs of employers. The employers define the characteristics and skill requirements of its workforce which may or may be matched by the graduates being produced by higher education institution. In higher education context, employability has a variety of meanings from the employment rate of graduates to the characteristics of the graduate. (Harvey, Locke and Morey, 2002)

Employability according to Finn (2000) is the ability to gain and maintain employment within and across organization. Employability is used interchangeable with other terms such as Core skills, Key skills and Common skills (UNESCO, 2012). Saterfield and McLarty (1995) indentified employability skills as the skills required to acquire and retain a job, including job-specific skills, academic skills and a range of attitudes and habits. Hillage and Pollard (1999) defined employability as "(a) ability to gain initial employment, (b) ability to maintain employment and make transition between jobs and roles within the same organization to meet new job requirements, and (c) ability to obtain new employment, it required to be independent in the labour market by being willing and able to manage employment transition between and within the organization.

Mismatch between the kind of education being provided and the demands of the labour market have been cited in the literatures such as Harvey and Green (1993) and Egbulu (2004) . As a result of this lack of fit, the educated young person becomes disadvantaged because the skills learnt in the university are not those required in the labour Market. Thus, even with a

degree, a person is not guaranteed paid employment owing to mismatch between skills and available jobs. This has created a widespread concern that schools are failing to impart the kind of skills that employers need. However, there is need to ascertain the important of quality of undergraduates in education so as to ensure that graduates of Nigerian universities maintain employability.

### Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the quality of undergraduates' training experience on their employability. Specifically, the objectives were:

1. Identify employability competencies required by employers of graduates.
2. Identify undergraduates' training experiences in relations to employability.
3. Examine the relationship between undergraduate's training experiences and competencies required by employers of graduates.

### Research Questions

1. What are the employability competencies required by employers of graduate?
2. What are the undergraduates' training experiences in relations to their employability?

### Null Hypothesis

There is no significant relationship between undergraduates' training experiences and competencies required by employers of graduates.

### Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The design was considered suitable for the study as it involving a small sample of graduate and employers to make inference on a larger population. The population of this study comprised all graduates and employers in Imo State. Four hundred (400) respondents were selected for this study; 200 employers and 200 graduates. The employers comprised staff of Human Resources Units (HRU) of Coca-cola bottling company, Vinal Aluminum Company, 7 randomly selected banks and staff of personnel / established units of 3 selected tertiary institutions in Imo State. The graduate selected for this study are graduate of different discipline from Universities, polytechnics and affiliated institutions presently

undergoing their postgraduate programme at Imo State University and Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State. Convenient sampling technique was used in selecting the respondents. Two validated researcher designed questionnaires were used in this study: Questionnaire for employers and questionnaire for graduates. The questionnaires were structured in four points likert scale of response options with keys provided to elicit answers to the items accordingly. The face and content validity of the instruments were established by three experts and a test re-test procedure was employed to establish the reliability coefficient of the instrument. Pearson Product Moments Correction (PPMC) was used to establish the coefficient of relationship. The reliability coefficient indexes were 0.73 and 0.68 respectively. Simple descriptive statistics, the mean score was used to answer the research questions. Mean scores below 2.5 were interpreted as disagree and 2.5 and above as agreed, while Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 alpha level.

## Result and discussion

The results of data analysis are presented in the table below,

Research Question 1: *What are the employability competencies required by employers of graduate*

Table 1: Perceived employability competencies require by employers of graduate.

S/N	Items	Mean	Decision
1	Ability to communicate clearly and concisely, using range of verbal and written method	3.61	Agree
2	Ability to work in teams and utilize appropriate interpersonal skills to build relationship with colleagues	3.43	Agree
3	Effective use of time and schedule in any given work-related situation	3.48	Agree
4	Ability to analysis problems and apply workable and logical solutions to such problems	3.32	Agree
5	Ability to see how things are interconnected and to approach work-related issues in a strategic and innovative manner	3.32	Agree
6	Ability to prepare and deliver effective presentations to different audience in a wide-range of circumstance.	3.51	Agree
7	Ability to lead a team, giving direction, providing structure and assigning responsibility to others	3.46	Agree
8	Ability to positively influence others using influencing techniques and negotiation skill	3.46	Agree
9	Ability to use information communication technology (ICT)	3.60	Agree
10	Ability to learn and adapt to any form of responsibility assigned	3.28	Agree

Table 1 above, shows perceived employability competencies required by employers of graduate. It revealed from the table that the respondents

agreed with all the items; ability to communicate clearly and concisely using a range of verbal and written methods, and ability to use ICT were the most outstanding, with mean scores of 3.61 and 3.60 respectively.

It would seem, therefore, that in addition to the individual's class of degree, subject studied, prior qualifications and social class background possessed by graduates other factors come into play when determining employability competences. Employability competences are important facets of the graduate portfolio. Of most important, it is assisting graduates to make a smooth transition from education to employment.

Research question 2: *What are the undergraduates' training experiences in relations to employability?*

Table 2: Undergraduates' training experience

S/N	Items	Mean	Decision
1	Adherence to university guidelines in coursework, assignment writing style and submission	3.48	Agree
2	Involvement in extra- curricula activities requiring communication skill development i.e student's peer representation company	3.20	Agree
3	Use of relationship building skills for the promotion of class cohesion during classroom discussion and debate	3.32	Agree
4	Utilization of high levels of reflexivity to manage time and self effectively.	3.41	Agree
5	Involvement in extra – curricula activities required a basic level of problem solving.	2.99	Agree
6	Adoption of a leadership role during reality learning activities in providing guidance and advice to peers.	3.18	Agree
7	Using of ICT to access information related to school assignments, sharing of lecture materials and checking of results	3.51	Agree
8	Awareness of own difficulties and able to seek help and advice where necessary	3.28	Agree
9	Evaluation of own learning strategies in light of reports generated from peer and lecturers	3.29	Agree

The table 2 above shows undergraduate training experience in relations to employability. It revealed from the table that the respondents agreed with all the items. Using of ICT to access information related to school assignments, sharing of lecture materials and checking of results and adherence to university guideline in course work, assignment and writing style and submission were the most outstanding with mean scores of 3.51 and 3.8 respectively.

The study shows that both graduates and employers agreed that undergraduate education/experiences are valuable in assisting a smooth



transition from education to employment. This indicated that both curricula (course of studying) and extra – curricula activities (mentoring, sports, politics, and other activities reflecting high levels of social capital) have their bases in employability. By working through each stages of learning activities, students promote their own employability.

### Hypothesis Testing

Null Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between undergraduates' training experience and competencies required by employers of graduates.

Table 3: Pearson's r showing the relationship between undergraduates' training experience and competence required by employers of graduate

Variables	N	R	Sig (2 tailed)	Decision
Undergraduates training experiences	400	0.242	0.000	Rejected
Competencies required by employers of graduate				

Table 3 shows that the calculated r value is 0.242 with significant probability value (p- value) of 0.000 computed at level of significance 0.05, since the calculated p-value of 0.000 is less than 0.05 alpha level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that there is significant relationship between undergraduate's training experiences and competences required by employers of graduate. It should be noted that the development of graduate training experience and skills is integral to the development of the employability competencies required by employers of graduate. It is expected that as students proceed through their undergraduate careers, their training experiences will develop along their employability competencies. In this respect, the competencies consist of an important feature of individual student personal development profiles. It is anticipated that by the time student reach the advanced stage of the employment competencies, they will be able to integrate their education experience with each other competency.

### Recommendation and Conclusion

In view of the findings presented above, it is necessary to reflect on how the concept of employability may be introduced into the undergraduate curriculum. This could be done by introducing employability as a course unit in addition to the discipline-focused content, this would enhance greatly the

### graduates' employment prospects.

In addition to introduction of employability into the curricula is the involvement of employers in undergraduate teaching and curricula development. This can be done through seminars and workshops in which the university or institutions invites the suitably experienced individuals to act as a guest lecturer on the undergraduate teaching and curricula development.

In conclusion, since employability is all about skills to maintain and retain employment, educational institution should stop in majoring in theoretical exposure and expose students to education experiences needed by the employers.

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