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SOCIAL AND COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS ACQUISITION: PANACEA TO ECONOMIC SAFETY AMONG UNEMPLOYABLE GRADUATES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The economy of Nigeria is plagued with an alarming rate of unemployment. Stakeholders are of the view that graduates are not employable due to lack of or insufficient relevant skills. Yet, there is a constant increase in the number of higher institutions of learning who produce graduates annually with the view that education guarantee employment. This proposes the appraisal of graduates from these higher education institutions of learning in Nigeria. This study, therefore, examined social and communication skills as determinants of graduate's employability in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo state. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The research was carried out in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo state. Purposive sampling technique was used to select six local governments in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo state. A total of 200 employers of labour were selected for the study. The results revealed employers required the employability skills (social and communications kills) ($t = -10.42$; $df\ 398$; $p < 0.05$) and ($t = -5.821$; $df\ 398$; $p < 0.05$) respectively, from graduates at high rate both private and public organizations, nevertheless graduates displayed high level of communications and social skills in Ibadan Metropolis, Oyo state. It was recommended that stakeholders should be aware of the perseverance for the creations of more job opportunities for graduates, in order to tackle the problem of increasing unemployment in Nigeria.

Keywords: Employability, Social skill, communication skill, graduate employment, University Graduates

Introduction

The belief that education, particularly the market relevant higher education, is a major outlet from poverty and other social-economic ills for both the individual and the society at large is one of major reason for the high demand for university education globally. In particular, most developing countries' citizens continue to demand for access to higher education as it is believed to be an important means of accessing labour market opportunities. However, despite the job opportunity prospect of higher education attainment, most higher education graduates are unable to secure employment even after several years of graduation (Babalola 2014).

According to the International Labour Organization ILO (2016), the global unemployment rate in 2012 rose to 5.9 percent of the workforce, increasing by 4.2 million people. Over 5.8% unemployment rate was reached as at 2015, while the unemployment rate was estimated to increase to 6.1% and 7% in 2016 and 2017 respectively. According to the ILO, "An uncertain economic outlook, and the inadequacy of policy to counter this, has weakened aggregate demand, holding back investment and hiring." "This has prolonged the labour market slump in many countries, lowering job creation and increasing unemployment duration even in some countries that previously had low unemployment and dynamic labour markets." The global economic crisis that began in 2007 has had a huge effect on the number of unemployed people around the world. The International Labour Organization (ILO 2016) global employment trends showed that the number of unemployed people around the world increased from 178 million in 2007 to 197 million in 2008 with a peak of 212 million reached in 2009. The economic outlook and the inadequacy of policy to counter the confronting challenges has weakened investment and hence employment opportunities. This has prolonged the labour market slump in many countries, lowering job creation and increasing unemployment duration.

In Nigeria, the challenge of unemployment among the teeming youth population is severe. According to available statistics, the population of the labour force (i.e, those within the working age population, willing, able and actively looking for work) rose from 79.9 million in the Q2 of 2016 to 80. 67 million by the Q3 of the year representing an increase of 0.98% in the labour force during the period (National Bureau of Statistics 2017 www.nigerianstat.gov.ng).

In the face of the problems of raising unemployment among many higher education graduates, the challenge of the lack of relevant skills as demanded by employers of labour has further increased the suspicion about the quality of higher education and graduates produced from those institutions of higher learning in the country. As a result of economic competitions and limited job opportunities occasioned by the problem of global economic decline and increasing youth population, many employers of labour now seek more innovative minds with the

necessary and relevant skills that would enhance their competitiveness in the global markets. This assertion conform with the works of Boateng and Ofori-Sarpong (2002), and Akerele and Opatola (2004) who argued that apart from the qualifications that graduates may possess, there are other attributes (non-academic skill requirements) which employers emphasize. Some of these expected skills include: good personal and social skills, analytical skills, good communication skills, technical and managerial skills, among others*****

The extent to which higher education particularly (university education) is capable of producing potential employable graduates in the competitive 21st century world is important for scholars and policymakers globally. This position is hinged on two major concerns. First, there are signs that patterns of work are rapidly changing with new sector emerging, and with technology, globalization and demographic changes significantly reforming the workforce (Oliver 2015; Pitan 2015). The implication of this change is that it is no longer enough for graduates to have a good degree, but that they should also possess the skills and attributes required to compete and collaborate in a dynamic knowledge economy and world of work.

The rate of unemployment in Nigeria inter-alia is alarming and worse is that the statistics is not improving. This scenario poses serious challenges to the goal of achieving a satisfactory level of socio-economic progress. Unemployment rate in Nigeria increased to 18.80 percent in the third quarter of 2017 from 16.20 percent in the second quarter of 2017. The rate of unemployment in country averaged 10.63 percent between 2006 to 2017, reaching an all-time high of 19.70 percent in the fourth quarter of 2009 and a record low of 5.10 percent in the fourth quarter of 2010 (National Bureau of Statistics 2017). In 2015, the unemployment rate which was 6.4 percent reached 18.8 in 2017. The figure below show the Nigeria unemployment rate from 2015 to 2017

NIGERIA UNEMPLOYMENT RATE



SOURCE: TRADES AND SERVICES DIVISION, NATIONAL BUREAU OF STATISTICS, NIGERIA

Indications from available statistics show the high rate of unemployment experienced by university graduates. This is however not only as a result of the unavailability of jobs, but also because of a dearth of candidates with employable skills that employers need (Pitan (2010). According to research, over 40 million unemployed youths in the country about 23 million are unemployable mainly due to lack of necessary skills for employment (Emeh., Nwanguma and, Abaroh 2012). In another study, Pitan and Adedeji (2012) revealed an overall skills mismatch of 60.6 percent among university graduates, with critical deficiencies in communication, information technology, decision-making, critical thinking, interpersonal relationship, entrepreneurial, technical and numeracy skills. Hitherto, this unemployment challenge among higher education graduates in the country has not improved due to these observed skill deficiencies. A number of researchers such as Dabaleni, Oni and Adekola (2000), David (2002); Akerele (2004), and National University Commission (2004), have revealed that apart from the qualifications that graduates possess, there are other attributes (non-academic skill requirements) which employers of labour emphasize. These attributes include analytical skills, good communication skills, good personal and social skills, technical and managerial skills among others.

It is evident from the foregoing that the concept of employability transcends just the possession of both academic and technical skills, it also includes the ability to effectively communicate and interact effectively within a work environment towards the achievement of the organizational goals. Hence, development and utilization of such skills is a lifelong process which a graduate who possesses such skills can utilize as a safety net in the face of unemployment challenges facing the country. *****

The possession of the appropriate and relevant skills by higher institutions graduates have been recognised from research result as important catalyst for reducing unemployment problem. A study by Blasko (2002) cited by Weligamage (2009) looked at the pattern of possession of five key skills among graduates from seven countries. The skills considered in the study were, oral and written communication skills, computer skills, teamwork problem solving skill learning abilities/reflective thinking and assessing one's own work. According to the report communication skills and improving own performances were considered as the most important by employers in all the countries considered for the research, while computing skills were perceived to be the least important skill demanded. However unfortunately that responses of employers of labour on the competencies and performance of most graduates reveal that these skills are lacking in labour market. Education enables individuals to acquire basic competencies to solve the problems they encounter, to adapt to social values and to apply social rules (Çubukçu & Gültekin 2006). It is easier for individuals who have adequate social skills to establish relationships in different aspects of their

lives (Kabasakal and Çelik, 2010). Social skills are one of the important factors of social and psychological development of a child. Acquiring and developing social skills are one of the important characteristics from the period of childhood. Since the graduates with high level of social skills have more techniques in solving daily interpersonal problems, they are more successful in their social relationships (Bacanli&Erdo_an F 2003).

The link between higher education and labour market as a driver for change in the modern economy in terms of equipping graduates with higher-level employability skills has been established. Thus, Dearing Report (1997) made recommendations about how Higher education institutes should develop to accommodate the needs of a changing student population. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Business Council of Australia (2002) had taken pioneer attempt to discover what employers really looking for, from their workers. According to the Employability Skills Framework presented by the organization, employers have mainly given attention on personal attributes which will mainly contribute to overall employability. Personal attributes maintained in this framework are loyalty, commitment, honesty and integrity, enthusiasm, reliability, personal presentation, common sense, positive self-esteem, a sense of humour, a balanced attitude to work and home life, an ability to deal with pressure, motivation and adaptability. The main skills requirements mentioned in the framework include: communication, teamwork, problem solving, planning and organizing, technology, learning, self- management, initiative and enterprise skills. Many of the businesses had suggested that educators should review and redevelop their curriculum and change delivery methodology to support the development of these skills and attributes.

Statement of the Problem

Graduate unemployment due to skill defficiencies as demanded by employers of labour has become one of the most challenging problem facing many countries. This problem is most severe in developing countries. In Nigeria, the problem of graduate unemployment has become so worrisome with its attendant consequences. Employers of labour and industry leaders complain that the skills and quality of the workforce from higher intuitions in the country falls below expectations. This development raise serious doubt about the quality of higher institution and the type of graduates produced from the institutions in the country. Lack of relevant and employable skills among graduates from higher institutions have the capacity to increase the unemployment problem in the country. High youth unemployment especially among higher institution graduates could lead to frustration and consequently social unrest such as armed robbery, kidnapping, hostage taking among other devices. The lack of job-relevant skills among graduates from higher institutions of learning also represents colossal financial

loss to parents, institutions of learning and the society at large. Although some previous studies have investigated skills and attributes demanded by employers of labour, little emphasis seems to be paid to such skills as Social and communications skill as integral parts of labour-market demand. This study provides an investigation to the social and communications skills required by employers from higher institutions graduates in the Nigeria labour market. In order to achieve the objective of this study, the following research questions and hypotheses were raised.

Research Question 1: To what extent do employers require social skill from graduates?

Research Question 2: To what extent do employers require communications skill from graduates?

Hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant difference between communication skills required by employers and those skills displayed by graduates.

Ho2: There is no significant difference between social skills required by employers and social skills displayed by graduates.

Scope of the Study

This research work focuses on the 200 employers of labour in both public and private organizations in Ibadan city, Oyo state, Nigeria.

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of all employers of labour in public and private organizations in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo state, Nigeria. The study employed purposive sampling technique to select 6 local government areas in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo state which are: Akinyele, Ibadan North East, Ibadan North West, Ibadan South East, Ibadan South West, Ibadan North local government. The reason for the choice of purposive was to the very limited presence of private large organizations in the city. A total of 200 employers of labour were selected for the study, from public and private organizations. The study makes use of questionnaire titled Graduate's employability skills Assessment, for which responses were collected from employers of labour. Descriptive statistics of frequency distribution, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to analyze the research questions while the t-test statistic was used to test the formulated hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study were discussed in line with the research questions and hypotheses raised in the study

Research Question 1: To what extent do employers require social skills from graduates?

The above research question was asked to find out the extent to which employers require social skill from graduates in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo state.

Table 1: The extent to which Employers requires Social skills from Graduates.

N	Items	Not Needed	Fairly Needed	Needed	Most Needed	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	Ability to work in a team	106(53.0)	15(7.5)	57(28.5)	22(11.0)	1.98	1.12
2	Ability to interact with co-workers	49(24.5)	8(4.0)	78(39.0)	65(32.5)	2.80	1.14
3	A sense of humour	2(1.0)	96(48.0)	44(22.0)	57(28.5)	2.77	.90
	Weighted Average	2.52(62.9%)					

Table 1 reveals that social skill is needed by employers of labour in the labour market. The weighted average stood at 2.52, which can be rated as 62.9%. This implies that the employers require relatively high social skills from graduates.

Research Question 2: To what extent do employers require communication skills from graduates?

Research question 2 was asked to find out the extent to which employers require communication skills from graduates in Ibadan metropolis, Oyo state.

Table 2: Extent to which Employers Requires Communications Skills

N	Items	Not Needed	Fairly Needed	Needed	Most Needed	Mean	Standard Deviation
4	Ability to write clearly and succinctly	12(6.0)	14(7.0)	128(64.0)	46(23.0)	3.04	.74
5	Ability to be verbal	51(25.5)	79(39.5)	50(25.0)	20(10.0)	2.20	.93
6	Ability to demonstrate	48(24.0)	84(42.0)	35(17.5)	31(15.5)	2.23	1.02

	good vocabulary						
7	Ability to listen and understand actively	4(2.0)	91(45.5)	70(35.0)	35(17.5)	2.68	.78
	Weighted Average	2.54(63.4%)					

Table 2: The weighted average of the table is 2.54 which represents 63.4%. This implies that the extent to which employers required communication skills from graduates is relatively high. It reveals that employers require communication skills from higher institution graduates. The rating is as given in the table: ability to write clearly and succinctly (mean = 3.04) and ability to listen and understand actively (mean = 2.68).

Ho1: There is no significant difference between social skills required by employers and social skills displayed by graduates.

Table 3: Summary of t-test analysis showing differences between social skills required and displayed.

Variable	N	mean	Standard deviation	T	Df	Sig.	Remark
SOCIAL SKILLS	200	7.54	2.11				
Required	200	8.80	2.21	-5.821	398	.000	Significant
Displayed							

Table 3 shows that there is a significant difference between social skills required and social skills displayed by graduates ($t = -5.821$; $df = 398$; $p < 0.05$). Therefore hypothesis is rejected. The mean values show that social skills displayed by graduates (mean = 8.80) is higher than what employers required (mean = 7.54).

Ho2: There is no significant difference between communication skills required by employers and communication skills displayed by graduates.

Table 4: Summary of t-test analysis showing differences between communication skills required and displayed.

Variable	N	mean	Standard deviation	T	Df	Sig.	Remark
Communication Skills Required	200	10.14	2.55	-10.416	398	.000	Significant
Communication Skills Displayed	200	12.49	1.92				

Table 4 shows that there is a significant difference between communication skills required and communication skills displayed by graduates ($t = -10.42$; $df = 398$; $p < 0.05$). Therefore H_0 is rejected. The mean values show that communication skills displayed by graduates (mean = 12.49) is higher than what employers required (mean = 10.14).

Discussion

The result of this study indicated that employers required social skills from graduates at a high level. The weighted average of the table is 2.52, which represents 62.9%. This finding indicated that employers required social skills from graduates both from private and public organizations at a high level. This is in line with Kabasakal and Çelik (2010) who emphasised that the possession of social skill is an important ingredient in the the work place and for establishing good relationship among others. Similarly, Boateng & Ofori-Sarpong (2002) and Akerele & Opatola (2004) in their respective studies on the labour market for tertiary graduates in Ghana and Nigeria remarked that apart from the qualifications that graduates may possess, other than the usual academic knowledge that employers of labour demand in the labour market. The researchers specially resounded the combined importance of social and communications skill in solving the problem of graduate unemployment in the market.

Bacanli & Erdoan (2003) supported that graduates with high level of social skills have more techniques in solving daily interpersonal problems. The researcher opined that individual with social skill are more successful in their social relationships and hence more productive than those without such skill.. In addition to maintaining social order, psychological health of the people and establishing healthy relationships with other people depend on their social skills (Yi_it, 2008). However, a contrary research report of Raza and Naqvi (2011), in their article on quality of Pakistani university graduates as perceived by employers, reveal that the employers were not fully satisfied with the quality of Pakistani university graduates in all the four areas of development skills which include social and communication skills. Personal development skills of graduates

were found to be relatively strong while they were lowest in social development skills.

Table 3 (Ho1) showed that there is a significant difference between social skills required and social skills displayed by graduates, the mean values showed that social skills displayed by graduates is higher than what employers required. This development is however surprising as literature has continuously affirmed that most higher institutions graduates do not poses the required skills as demanded by employers of labour. Nevertheless, it is not impossible that the growth in skill among graduates could be due high awareness created over time on the importance of skill possession by graduates. Moreover, it is not also unlikely that employers of labour got more than the required number as a result of the large number of applicants who usually apply for few available job opportunities in Nigeria. According to Philips Consulting Report 2014, there are overwhelming numbers of graduate applicants in the country competing for limited vacancies which in turn tends to discourage most employers from sifting through them all in order to get the truly qualified applicants. Hence, they depend on external assistance and sometimes end up recruiting unsuitable candidates. Also, the reason for the greater available skill presented could be due to high salary demand by those graduates with the requisite job skill. demand of salary is high due to the high cost of living in Nigeria. Philips Consulting Report 2014, opined that a high salary demand by qualified job seekers could equally reduce the number of employees needed by employers of labour.

The result of this findings revealed that the extent to which employers required communication skills from graduates is high, the weighted average as shown in the table is 2.54, which represents 63.4%. The findings indicated that employers required communications skills from graduate both from private and public organizations at a high extent. The findings of this study is consistent with 2010 survey conducted by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, that communication skills are ranked highest among job-seeking candidates. According to Pitan and Adedeji (2012) communication skills is ranked as one of the leading skills employers demand from graduates.

Pitan (2015) also, concluded in his study that communication skills are one of the skills that were generally rated highest among all the five sectors selected in her research. This implies that employers expect graduates to be equipped with communication skills to function perfectly both in private and public organizations. This is consistent with Freire, Alvares and Montez (2011) who found that other competencies, such as communication, leadership, customer service, understanding, and emotional intelligence, were the most valued competencies needed for work performance.

The study also revealed that graduates displayed high level of communication skills in the workplace both in private and public organization which is in support

with the high level of communications skills required by employers from graduates, the weighted average of the table 4 is 3.13, which is rated as 78.13%. According to the study graduates displayed the required communication skills which means that communication skills is not one of the reason for graduates not being employed. This finding is in line with Anho (2011) who revealed that over 94 percent of the private sector employers perceived graduates of Nigeria Universities to be of high quality while 80 percent of the public sector employers perceive them to be of high quality.. However, both the private and public sector employers rated the graduates high on the some indices contrary to Dabalem, Oni, & Adekoya (2000) who were of the view that most graduates are out-rightly poor both in written and oral communications as well as in technical skills. Also the result showed that there is a significant difference between communication skills required and communication skills displayed by graduates, the mean values show that communication skills displayed by graduates (12.49) is higher than what employers required (10.14). This is in consistent with research conducted by Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011). Referring to the work of Cranmer (2006), Hinchliffe and Jolly (2011), concluded that there was no statistically significant relationship between the provision of enhanced skills at higher education institutions and increased probability of employment. It is possible that there are not enough employment opportunity for graduates hence the possibility of higher skill supply than the demand. Pop and Barkhuizen (2010) suggest that the lack of soft skills, workplace readiness and practical experience are some of the challenges associated with employment problem among higher education graduates in many developing countries.

Although the available results may have shown that graduates possess the required social and communication skills, it is also could be argued that graduates inability to access the employment market may not be restricted to social and communication skill alone but such factors as experiences, age as well as other necessary skill skills as may be demanded by employers. This position corroborates with the research report of Philips Consulting Report 2014 which submitted that some companies specify age limit and experience for graduates job-seekers.

Conclusion

This study analysed social and communication skills as determinant of graduate's employment prospect in Ibadan Metropolis Oyo State, Nigeria. The main focus of the study was to find out the social and communication skills required by employers of labour and if graduates displayed these skills. A Good Communicator has the ability of maintaining open lines of communication with others, demonstrate sensitivity and empathy as well having the ability to listen to and consider others viewpoints. The possession of this skill and the ability of an

employee to recognize, interpret the verbal and non-verbal behaviour of others, speaks clearly, in precise language and logically is an important factor in creating opportunity for job seekers organized

It showed from our findings that there is a significant difference between communication skills required and communication skills displayed by graduates, therefore Ho1 is rejected. The mean values show that communication skills displayed by graduates is higher than what employers required. Also, there is a significant difference between social skills required and social skills displayed by graduates. Therefore Ho2 is rejected. The mean values show that social skills displayed by graduates is higher than what employers required. The result showed that social and communication skills appeared to be sought after by employers of labour and it also showed from findings that graduates displayed high level of social and communications skills. Thus there is the need to emphasise social and communications skill in the higher education curriculum in order to enhance the employment prospects of higher education graduates in the country.

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