

THE DYNAMICS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: *Higher education institutions are increasingly expected to engage with the challenges of the contemporary world. However, in Nigeria, Higher is facing a lot of challenges and unable to meet the basic demand of what it is established to achieve. This paper is therefore an attempt to examine the dynamics of Higher Education and Graduate Employability in Nigeria with the main aim of discussing the challenges facing the universities in general and how these could be addressed in the transformation and employability of the graduates.*

Keywords: Higher Education; Graduate; Skill; Employability; Nigeria

1. Introduction

Pointing out the role of education as a regenerative process of social values and as a fundamental instrument society's existence, Dewey (1997) defined education as the agent of social regeneration. Thus, for Dewey, education is a fundamental agency for individual and social development. That is why one of the main purposes of a post-secondary education system is to prepare graduates for the labour market, or to enable individuals to earn sustainable livelihoods through self-employment or through the establishment of a company or cooperative. Everyone should be able to make a living for themselves and contribute skills to a developing economy.

There are evidences supporting the fact that appropriate increase in the production of graduates benefits the society by raising work-related competencies thus boosting economic growth (Bakry and Bakry 2005; Omolo, 2010). Moreover, it has been globally recognized that higher education are centres of higher learning, which are considered as expedient agents of development in the nation building. For instance, universities generate, disseminate and utilize knowledge. As primary contributors to economic growth, they produce scientists, engineers, professionals, technicians, scholars, managers and men of exquisite capabilities. Thus, the aim of higher education is to meet the socio-cultural and developmental needs of a country. Higher education provides that opportunity for individuals to develop their potential fulfils the needs for high-level manpower in a society. As primary contributors to economic growth, they produce scientists, engineers, professionals, technicians, scholars, managers and men of exquisite capabilities. Thus, the aim of higher education is to meet the socio-cultural and developmental needs of a country. Higher education provides that opportunity for individuals to develop their potential fulfils the needs for high-level manpower in a society.

A country's social and economic development depends on the nature and level of higher education. Education and economic development are the twin rails that can lead any country to a higher plateau and help in achieving goals of raising the standard of living in their states. The place higher education occupies in the structure of education is higher than other levels of education

- it is the post-secondary education received in universities, polytechnics, mono- technics and colleges of education
- The purpose is uniquely to prepare middle- level and high-level skilled manpower for farms, factories, firms (companies, businesses and organizations) in an economy
- The programmes (in terms of curriculum and teachers) are of higher order than those at the lower levels of education
- These are degrees, certificates, diplomas at undergraduate and postgraduate levels as well as advanced scientific and technological information for the economy.

The forgoing therefore explains that the criterion for measuring the success of an educational system is in a part, the degree to which the schools provide trained personnel to fill the needs of firms (Blaug, 1970). Essentially, schools are viewed as the single most important agency of socialization for creating competent adult workers for modern work institutions (Parsons, 1960). Sanusi (2002: 8) probably had this in mind when he said that:

There should also be an effective linkage between the tertiary institutions and industries in undergraduate training, and in research and development. Our tertiary institutions should be guided strictly by a credible admission policy on course basis with a view to checking the imbalance in the system and reflecting national development needs.

The above remark is not without a cause. The general belief in the country is that the quality of tertiary education (and indeed other levels) has reduced drastically. Many have deteriorated beyond producing half-baked graduates. The labour market prospects for the undergraduates are therefore limited. The labour market report on the prospect of Nigerian graduates shows that employers complained that graduates are poorly prepared for work (Jimoh 2007). The report affirmed that academic standards have fallen drastically and as a result, Nigerian graduates are viewed as half-baked and ill-equipped for the labour market. The major consequence therefore is unemployment.

The forgoing shows that higher education institutions are increasingly expected to engage with the challenges of the contemporary world, that is why policymakers have repeatedly asked for investment in personal skills as a route to building resilience and aiding recovery following myriads of economic recession across the world. The industry reinforces this call by requiring professionals who can fulfil the demands of the new contexts and trends, such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

However, higher education institutions are often criticized for not preparing graduates for the real contexts involved in their professional practice. For that reason, it is not surprising that graduate employability has become one of the central issues that drive the mission of higher education institutions. Thus, the present situation of rapidly increasing enrolment in higher education without improving employability is

far becoming an issue. Thus, one of the problems that face undergraduate youths in Nigerian tertiary institutions is the inability to find employment when they graduate. The criticism has been that the educational system is bookish, elitist and colonial in orientation (Alapiki, 1984), and does not reflect the actual needs of the country in terms of the types and various mixes of manpower that are needed for the social and economic transformation of the nation.

Undeniably, the relationship between higher education and employment of graduates is an issue that is relevant both for academics, researchers, and practitioners in the area of higher education (Kalufya and Mwakajinga, 2016; P. Knight and Yorke, 2004; Mwita, 2018). This has called for a clear understanding of the dynamics of higher education and graduate employability in Nigeria. The education experts have also expressed some concerns about the and the rate of employment of the most highly qualified segment of the labour force (Schomburg and Teichler, 2006). As Anderson (2017) argues, graduate employability has become a thorny issue in the future economy of Africa. Some factors which have been mentioned as the leading cause of this problem include the lack of skills in business training, emphasis on the public sector, unattractive agricultural sector, and inadequate labour information on youth employment (Ndyali, 2016).

This paper is therefore is an attempt to examine the dynamics of Higher Education and Graduate Employability in Nigeria with the main aim of discussing the challenges facing the universities in general and how these could be addressed in the transformation and employability of the graduates.

2. Historical Dynamics, Functions and Goals of Higher Education in Nigeria

The capacity of a nation to develop economically, socially, politically and culturally derives largely from the power to develop and utilize the capabilities of its people. Higher education thus is considered sine qua non of national development, for it produces the highest level of manpower. In all advanced countries, the universities constitute the main spring of human capital. The most successful discharge of the universities role as a change agent is in the area of science and technology.

The training of high-level scientific manpower is a matter of vital national concern. Higher education is today recognized as a capital investment in education. It is considered investment of human capital which increases labour productivity furthers technological innovation and produces a rate of return markedly higher than that of physical capital. Today we find the world divided into developed and developing countries. The dividing line between them is the capacity of educational and scientific attainments and its application for economic progress and prosperity (The World Bank, 1990).

In modern times, higher education is considered as a means of human resource development in a society. In advanced countries, universities constitute the main spring of knowledge, ideas and innovations. Today, the most successful discharge of a university as an agent of change is in science and technology. The priming and grooming of high-level professional manpower is a matter of vital concern. As a pathway to socio-economic development in a country, higher education cannot be ignored or given low priority. Higher education in a state of rapid development

everywhere in the world as its benefits to the social, economic and cultural life of different communities is realizable. This has led to worldwide exponential expansion of universities and colleges; as many more people are encouraged remaining in education. However, there are problems. First, higher education is expensive, and its expansion requires ample resources. Second, rapid expansion raises problems of quality assurance and control, as increased numbers could so easily lead to a decline in standards. Third, expansion in the developing world often draws upon the resources, ideas and expertise of the developed world, even though these may not always be appropriate for every different economic and social system (North, 1997). Thus higher education plays an important role in the development of society. Universities for centuries had a crucial role in educating the potential professionals, businessmen, political leaders, religious and social philosophers, who serve the community, enrich its values and develop its resources. Universities are complex organisations with multiple missions and a myriad of roles. A university has the roles of providing of theoretical education and professional training, a developer and a disseminator of new knowledge, a catalyst to shape the practice of management and business and a contributor to the community and the national economy (Khurshid, Al-Aali, Soliman, and Amin, 2012). The foregoing explains that higher education is more or less specialized type of education which individual students obtain at the post-secondary level of schooling such as: universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, colleges of agriculture and other monotchnics.

However, following independence, Nigeria saw shortage of manpower as a bottleneck. Consequently, the country, focused on the expansion of higher education especially university education. Thus, between 1960 and 1999, there were 3 major generations of universities.

1. Six first-generation universities were established between 1960 and 1975
 2. Second-generation universities (1975-1979) were created to satisfy the demands of the 12 new states created in 1970
 3. Third-generation specialised federal universities were established 1980-1999.
 4. State universities were creations of the 1979 Constitution which provided for concurrent ownership of universities
 5. While private universities started to flourish in Nigeria between 1993 till date
- This gave room for increasing presence of regulatory bodies in higher education, because as each state struggled for equal representation, there was the federal character policy that eventually translated to the logic of admission quota system and creation of JAMB in 1977
- National Universities Commission [NUC] was established in 1962
 - National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), established in 1977
 - The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) was later established based on Acts 3 of 1989 and amended by Acts 7 1997.

Currently, Nigeria has 171 Universities (National University Commission NUC, 2020). The summary therefore is that Nigeria has over 300 higher institutions. The rise in the number of higher institutions in the country finds explanation in the goals which the institutions are set to achieve in the country. The Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN 2014:36) stated that goals of tertiary education to include;

- (a) Contribute to national development through higher level relevant manpower

- training;
- (b) Develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society;
 - (c) Develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments;
 - (d) Acquire both physical and intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society;
 - (e) Promote and encourage scholarship and community service;
 - (f) Forge and cement national unity, and
 - (g) Promote national and international understanding and interaction.

Given the above goals and the number of higher institutions, one would have expected Nigeria to have overcome the problem of unemployment through the instrumentality of education. However, the problem remains unabated.

The phenomenon of graduate unemployment unavoidably began to emerge due to the lopsided production of high level manpower. With the eclipse of the second republic in December 1983, the succeeding military regime repealed the law on private universities in 1984 and closed down the established few. It is notable that the Minimum Standards Decree promulgated in 1985 provided for the accreditation of courses in Universities and polytechnics. Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) was introduced in June 1986 by the World Bank and this engendered a mixed grill on higher education system in Nigeria. How this happened was that SAP encouraged the withdrawal of the state from the economy especially from the social service sector considered to be non-productive and therefore, wasteful. Education sector was one of the victims of this philosophy. The communiqué of the conference on Academic Freedom organized by the Academic Staff Union of (Nigerian) Universities (ASUU) and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESTRIA), Dakar, Senegal, summarized the state of higher education in Nigeria under SAP dispensation as follow:

- (a) Infrastructural facilities/equipment for teaching, research and learning are either lacking, or very inadequate, and in bad state, thus restricting the freedom to carry out the basic functions of the academia;
- (b) Students' residential accommodation are grossly inadequate and are frequently uninhabitable or environmentally hazardous, thus violating the right of the students to a conducive atmosphere for rest and studies;
- (c) There is a serious shortage of classrooms and office accommodation. The few available ones are inadequately and poorly furnished;
- (d) Conditions of service have completely deteriorated with serious negative impact on morale and productivity of academics, and the exercise of academic freedom;
- (e) Related to the issue of underfunding and in conformity with the World Bank philosophy is the withdrawal of subsidies on students' feeding and introduction of various fees in the institutions of higher learning which have imposed severe condition on students and violated the rights of many aspiring students to higher learning; and
- (f) There is a high level of moral decay in the institution of higher education largely as a result of the collapse of the conditions of service (for teachers), and the worsening

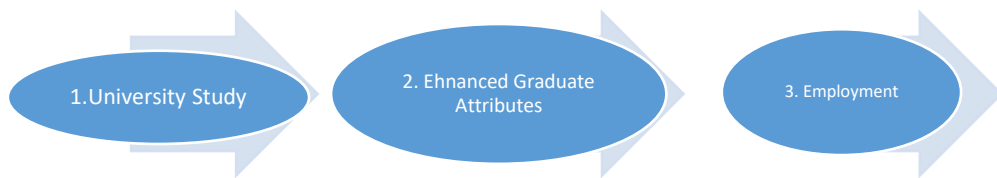
condition of subsidies (for students). The communiqué further observed that higher institutions and academic in Nigeria are now forced to accept reforms dictated from outside by either government or its agencies or through non-government agencies, by forces of international finance capital-most notably, the World Bank. (CODESTRIA 1996:6)

Given the above background, one is compelled to ask: what then is the labour market prospects for undergraduates?

3. What is Employability?

Employability can be defined as the possession of relevant knowledge, skills and other attributes that facilitate the gaining and maintaining of worthwhile employment(Kessy, 2020). While there are extensive discussions in the media about graduate unemployment and the 'skills gap' (between the skills graduates have, and those that are needed in the job market), there is in fact a surprisingly weak evidence base. The assumption is that a linear causal relationship exists between the input of university study, the attributes that graduates take into the job market, and their success in obtaining work, as seen in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Employability – a linear progression?



Source: Going Global (2014). www.britishcouncil.org/education/ihe

However, there are a number of other factors affecting progression between stages 1, 2 and 3. Graduate capacities are influenced by learning experiences outside the university, particularly in the family and previous schooling. Second, a range of factors beyond one's employability attributes affect entry into employment, such as the availability of jobs, graduates' social networks, and possible discrimination. The interaction between these influential factors is not sufficiently well understood. There are, however, three areas in which we do have existing knowledge.

To buttress this, Morley (2001) however states that employability is not just about students making deposits in a bank of skills, Knight (2001) further considers the notion of employability to be; "A synergic combination of personal qualities, skills of various kinds and subject understanding". Thus, the understanding of employability can be seen to be more complicated than the emphasis that Dearing (1997) has placed on student's personal qualities, which suggests less emphasis on these qualities and more on generic academic skills. However, it could be assumed that the individual's personal skills could have considerable bearing on a particular students' success in the employability stakes.

The jobs market is rapidly changing with new sectors emerging, changing the nature of work and the way employees perceive the workplace. Graduates will have to

be flexible and have the personal capabilities to manage changing and challenging work situations. Employers are looking to recruit graduates who fit into the organizational culture and utilize their abilities and skills to transform the company by facilitating innovative teamwork (Harvey, 2001).

According to Yorke and Knight (2004) employability is seen to be influenced, amongst other things by students' self-efficacy beliefs, student's self-theories and personal qualities. They highlight that what is of critical importance is the extent to which students feel that they can "make a difference". This, importantly, not only broadens the focus to include a wider range of attributes required to be successful within employment but also includes the attributes required to manage one's career development in ways that will sustain one's employability.

Similarly, Hillage and Pollard (1998), however, see employability as being capable of getting and fulfilling work through the ability to be self-sufficient within the labour market, to realise the potential through sustainable employment. Further, their finding from their report for the DFES for developing a framework for policy analysis on employability, found that employability is about having the capability to gain initial employment, maintain that employment and if necessary, find new employment. Knight and Yorke (2003), however, define Employability as; "A set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen careers." (Knight and Yorke, 2003)

Employability of a graduate is the predilection of the graduate to show attributes that employers predict will be required for the future successful functioning of their organization (Harvey, 1997). He further suggests that graduates will need to be flexible due to the increasing number of short time contracts and part-time work in the workplace (Harvey, 2000). This suggests that employability is likely to be less about nurturing attributes, techniques or experiences just to enable a student to get a job; it is about learning with less emphasis on 'employ' and more on 'ability'. The prominence is on developing critical and reflective skills, with a view to empowering and enhancing the learner. Employment is a by-product of this enabling process (Harvey, 2003; Lees, 2002; Knight and Yorke, 2002).

From the foregoing, employability can be seen as a process of producing graduates who are capable and able, Williams and Owen (1997) state the most perceived graduate qualities are the ability to learn, intelligence, ideas and imagination and communication skills. Billing (2003) adds employers want employees who are "effective communicators, problem solvers and critical thinkers, and can work well within a team". (Billing, 2003). To understand employability therefore requires a consideration of the various component parts and the different ways in which it is described and evaluated, the generic transferable skills nurtured through university, through to competencies required for employment.

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4. Graduate Unemployment in Sub Sahara Africa

Analysis and report from British Council (2014) indicated that in Nigeria the unemployment rate is as high as 23.1 per cent for those with undergraduate degrees. Although the rate for university graduates is much lower in South Africa (5.9 per cent 12), it is high for those with diploma or certificate level qualifications. Unemployment figures specifically for university graduates are not available in Ghana and Kenya. However, across the 25–29 age group as a whole (the range corresponding most closely with recent graduates) the unemployment rate is 41.6 per cent in Ghana 13, and 15.7 per cent in Kenya 14. (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). It has been estimated that, on average, it takes a university graduate five years to secure a job in Kenya. There is widespread concern about the work readiness of graduates. While employers are generally satisfied with the disciplinary knowledge of students, they perceive significant gaps in their IT skills, personal qualities (e.g. reliability) and transferable skills (e.g. team working and problem solving). Research carried out in Nigeria has shown a significant 'skills mismatch' between employer requirements and graduates' display of skills in the workplace, particularly in relation to communication, IT, decision making and critical thinking. (Omolo, 2010).

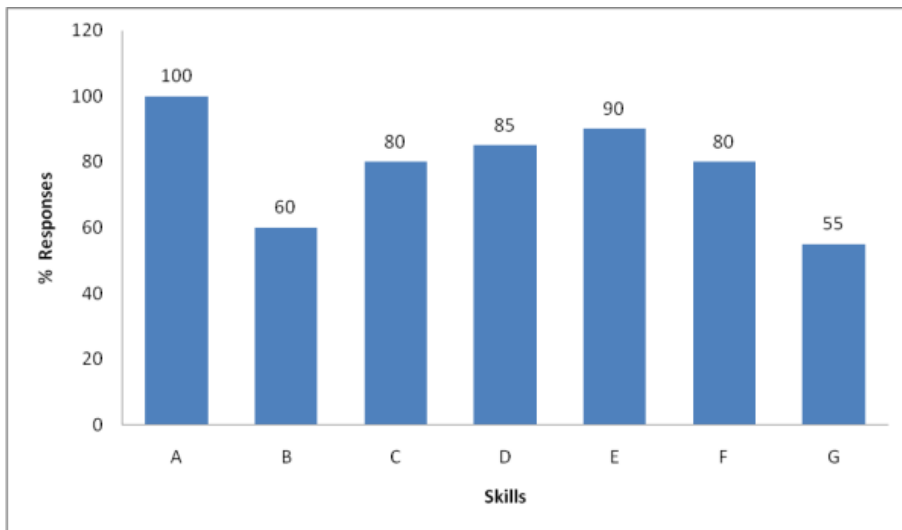
Similarly, in the 2nd quarter of 2019, National Bureau of Statistics said the national labour force was 69%, and the employment-to-population ratio was 66.6%, meaning 33.4% of the labour force were unemployed. Going by these figures, and working with an estimated population of 200m, Nigeria's labour force is roughly 138m, 33.4% or 66.8m of which are unemployed, as of mid- 2019. (NBS, 2019). The NBS also stated that 38.1% of unemployed have post-secondary education, translating to 25.4m unemployed graduates, with diploma or degree qualifications. Nigeria Graduate report 2016, in fact, said '36.26% of recent graduates are currently unemployed'. Many graduates are also underemployed or wrongly employed, in respective of their disciplines often ending up as schoolteachers, commercial drivers, uber drivers, farmers, salesmen, marketers, and factory workers.

5. Employment of Higher Education Graduates in Nigeria

Despite this upsurge number of tertiary institutions; enrolment rate; and increased graduate turnout, the issues of graduate unemployment and underemployment with their attendant consequences (such as increased crime rate, unfulfilled dreams, suicide, impaired financial position etc.) are posing a great challenge to many developing countries of which Nigeria is one. In Nigeria, national unemployment rate escalated from 11.9 percent in the year 2005 to 14.9 percent in 2008. As at 2009, the rate had increased to 19.7 percent (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). This situation is seen as a generalized waste of human resources. The questions are: has there been enough demand for all these graduates by the labour market? Does this mean that the human resources development efforts of the government and individuals have been a waste since those trained cannot put their skills into productive use? How far has the Nigerian educational system been able to adequately prepare students for the world of work? Of what importance are skills acquired by graduates when they are not demanded in the labour market?

Buttressing this point Akinyemi; Ofem, and Ikuenomore (2012) reveals that Nigerian graduates do not possess employable skills to match-up to the requirement of jobs in the present-day labour market. He discovered in the study that apart from the qualifications that graduates possessed, there were other attributes which the employers emphasized as criteria for graduates’ employability. These attributes include; verbal and written communication, analytical and investigative abilities, entrepreneurship and managerial skills, team work, computer skills, time management, and drive and flexibility.

Figure 2: Skills Required for Graduate Employment in Nigeria



Keys

- A – Verbal and written Communication*
- B – Analytical and Investigative Abilities*
- C - Entrepreneurship and Managerial Skills*
- D - Team Work*
- E – Computer Skills*
- F – Time Management*
- G – Drive and Flexibility*

Source: Akinyemi (2012)

This finding also agrees with Dabalen, Oni and Adekola (2002); National University Commission (2004); and Boeteng and Ofori-Sarpong (2002) that analytical skills, good communication skills, good personal and social skills, technical and managerial skills are, among others, the factors determining graduates being employed in the present modern workplace and not their qualifications. Corroborating this, former president APJ Abdul Kalam emphasized that only 25% of graduates were employable while 75% were not because they lacked technical knowledge, English proficiency and critical thinking (The Guardian, August 31, 2010). The study also found that graduate turnout outpaced the graduate employment over the years in Nigeria. Officially, the percentage of the extent of mismatch between the registered

unemployed and placement between the year 2003 and 2007 ranges from 74% to 91%. In the words of Bankole (2002), many subjects studied in the Nigerian universities are no longer marketable and this has posed a serious problem to the country (NISER). This has led so many unemployed graduates into crimes such as frauds, armed robbery and others. It was also discovered in the study that the total graduate unemployment increased in an unprecedented manner in the years under study. By the year 2003, the total graduate unemployment rate was 25.6% but in the year 2009, it had risen to 40.3%. The World Bank (2009) report warned that unless constraints to growth were removed systematically in those industries that were particularly employment intensive and should stand a chance of being competitive globally, it was unlikely that these trends would be reversed, but further exacerbating tensions and youth unrest.

6. Why Employment of Higher Education Graduate is Important?

There is no doubt given the foregoing that higher education plays an important role in human capital development and economic growth.

Articulation between higher education and employment in the workplace has been a focus of initiatives in many African Countries and Nigeria in particular. There is pressure on higher education from both Government and employers to produce employable graduates with the attributes, capabilities and dispositions to work successfully. There has often been a complex relationship and a common misunderstanding between higher education institutions (HEIs) and employers, particularly in the private sector. Employers often voice concern over the quality of graduates from universities and other higher education institutions, while HEIs feel that business is not fully appreciative of what qualities and skills these graduates possess.

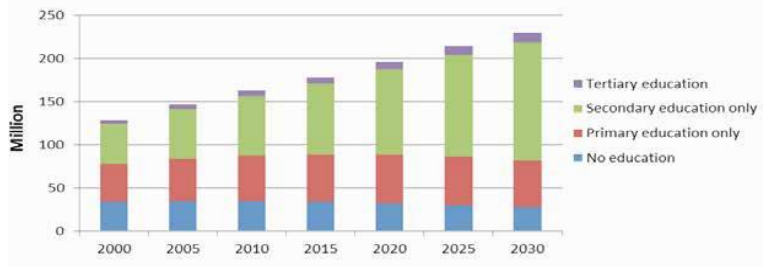
By international comparison, tertiary enrolment in African countries is still low and there is a lack of highly skilled experts in engineering, science and medicine. Thus, Africa has the youngest population in the world, and the educational level is ever increasing (Griesel and Parker, 2009). By 2030, 59% of the population aged 20-24 years in Africa will have benefited from secondary education. That will result in 12 million persons with tertiary education in 2030. This is a great opportunity but also a risk for more unemployed graduates. The expansion of tertiary education must be carefully planned. Nearly 60% of the unemployed are aged between 15 and 24, a significant number of whom are graduates. It is clear that merely increasing tertiary enrolment will not be sufficient to meet the needs of labour markets (Koloba, 2017).

The above discussion has exposed a very important fact that graduate employment and employability must be carefully considered. The factors affecting graduate employment and employability can be grouped into 3 categories: (i) exogenous factors relating to the absorptive capacity of the country for its graduates; (ii) endogenous factors associated with the institutions' effort to employability of its graduates; and (iii) factors linking the exogenous and endogenous factors. Buttressing this view, Dabalén, et al (2000), and Ogundowole (2002) have identified possible causes of low quality of graduates in Nigeria. According to them, one of these is decline in staff quantity which is reflected in the high rate of human capital flight. So many professionals and qualified lecturers have left Africa for developed world in search of jobs. Owen (Appleton and Teal, 1998) reporting the extent of the flight of the most

educated Africans from the continent in 1993 said, in the UK, there were 134,500 Africans: 14,500 had first degrees and 4,600 had advanced degrees. Of all the ethnic minorities in the UK, Africans formed the largest percentage with recognized educational qualifications. Williams (Appleton and Teal, 1998) also corroborates this fact by pointing out that as at 1994, estimated 100,000 skilled Africans worked in Europe and North America. These skilled Africans were typically doctors, research scientists and university teachers

The endogenous factors include massification of higher education and the lack of creation of adequate jobs, which is the main cause of the rise of unemployment rates for graduates. This situation has forced many students to continue their studies, thus paradoxically reducing their chances of being recruited because of over qualification. Exogenous factors include stiff competition for human skills globally, as other parts of the world attract many graduates from the continent and also depriving African learners of the best trainers. In many African countries, the unemployment rate among young graduates is higher than 30%. If the general unemployment rate reaches a level of around 15%, the unemployment among young graduates can typically reach around 30%. However, there are also countries like Malawi, where university graduates had almost no unemployment, according to the most recent study (Van der Berg, and Van der Broekhuizen, 2012).

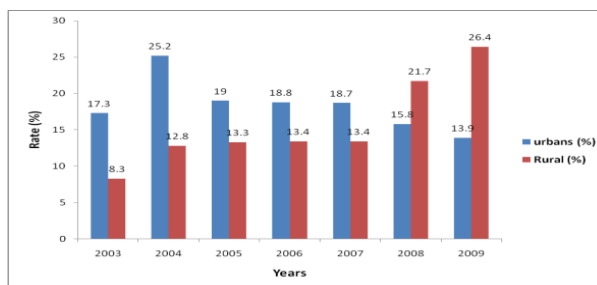
Figure 3: 20-24 year-old cohorts by education, 2000-2030.



Source: Omolo(2012)

In spite of this, enrolments in tertiary education according to Akinyemi (2012) are still low

Figure 4: Chart Showing Graduate Unemployment in Urban and Rural Areas of Nigeria



Source: Akinyemi (2012)

According to Oyekanmi (2020) Nigeria’s unemployment rate as at the second quarter of 2020 is 27.1% indicating that about 21,764,614 (21.7 million) Nigerians remain unemployed.

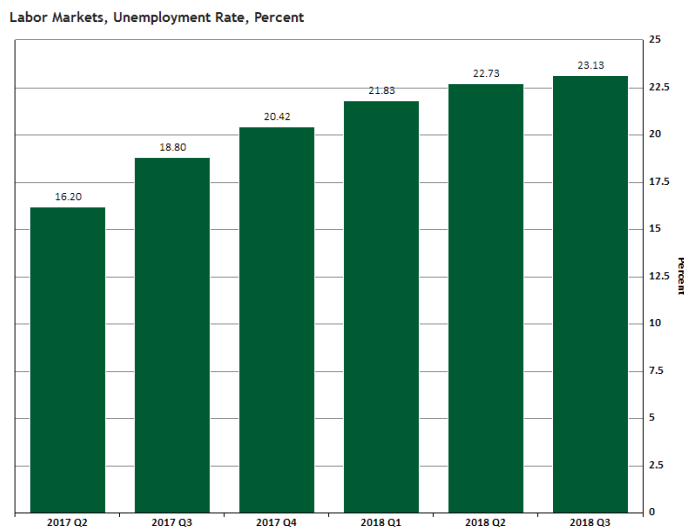
Nigeria’s unemployment and underemployment rate (28.6%) is a combined 55.7%. This means the total number of Nigerians who are unemployed or underemployed as at 2020 Q2. Nigeria’s unemployment rate as at the second quarter of 2020 is 27.1% indicating that about 21,764,614 (21.7 million) Nigerians remain unemployed. Nigeria’s unemployment and underemployment rate (28.6%) is a combined 55.7%. This means the total number of Nigerians who are unemployed or underemployed as at 2020 Q2.

The foregoing shows that Nigeria’s youth remain the hardest hit by unemployment with over 13.9 million people aged between 15 and 34 years unemployed. As a consequence, there is a lack of graduates in certain professions, which is made even worse by the brain drain. Furthermore and paradoxically, most African countries record high unemployment rates among young graduates. The present situation of rapidly increasing enrolment in higher education without improving employability is to be addressed urgently. In order to avoid increased unemployment among young graduates, more focus should be placed on quality and labour market needs.

7. How to Improve Employability for Higher Education Graduates

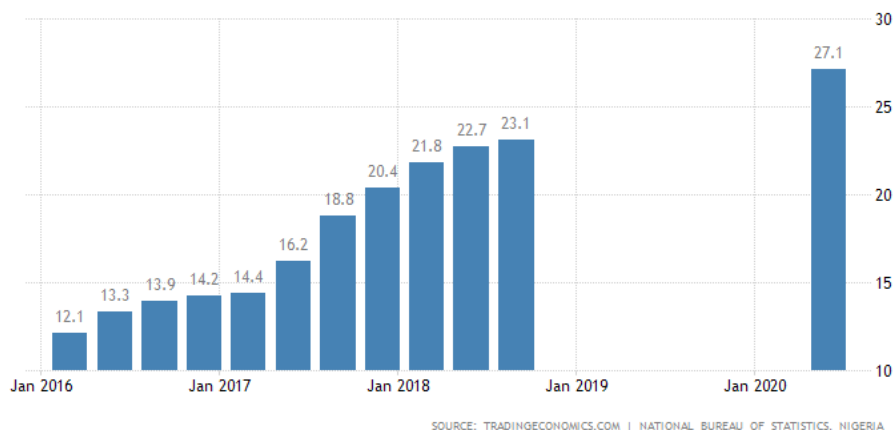
Graduate unemployment has been a major issue in Nigeria, and for almost a decade now, nothing has change for better.

Figure 5: Unemployment rate in Nigeria 2017-2018



Source: National Bureau of Statistics

([https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/elibrary?queries\[search\]=unemployment%20rate%20in%20Nigeria%202010-2020](https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/elibrary?queries[search]=unemployment%20rate%20in%20Nigeria%202010-2020)).

Figure 6: Unemployment rate in Nigeria 2017-2020

It is important to note however, that youth unemployment can be reduced if tertiary education institutions link up with productive sectors for the development of curriculum. The tracer studies carried out by national authorities in countries like Ghana and Namibia show that the greater the distance between classroom-imparted skills and skills required in the worlds of work, the higher the rate of graduate unemployment is likely to be. (ADEA, 2015)

Entrepreneurship education is essentially critical in most Nigerian societies, where students are highly socialized into a “wage-earner” mindset in the face of rising graduate unemployment. Accordingly, entrepreneurship education can be for all when it is aimed at equipping students of Higher Education Institutions with entrepreneurial behaviour to make them more marketable on the job market and to make self-employment an attractive alternative. At the same time, it can be designed with specializations for the purpose of extensively preparing persons for self-employment (and for job creation), equipping the self-employed with entrepreneurial competencies for the growth and development (job creation inclusive) of their ventures and/ or for developing SME development practitioners and even entrepreneurship educators.

Similarly, curriculum should be more adapted to the real world. Cooperation with business should be much closer. Higher Education Institutions should assist more in job-seeking in special dedicated units. The same units should provide support for alumni associations.

More job counselling is essential to ensure an efficient transformation from education to work. And it is essential to conduct tracer studies. First, tertiary education institutions have a big potential to push the frontiers of science, technology and innovation to greater heights; to do this, they need to adopt an innovative systems approach which focuses on making knowledge accessible for it to be used by all actors in the processes of innovation. In line with this, researchers and innovators in these institutions need a paradigm shift through which they stop looking at research, science, technology and innovation as ‘academic’, self-serving engagements but as vehicles for the growth and competitiveness of their organizations and the development of Nigeria’s economies.

Secondly, if 'science' as taught and practiced in tertiary education institutions is to meet and blend with the technology and innovation in the worlds of production in firms and farms, there needs to be convergences between this science and those technologies and innovations. In recent years such convergences have emerged in agricultural research. Apart from all these, there is also the need for:

1. Review and renew missions and visions of institutions of tertiary education to give them a sharper focus on science, technology and innovation.
2. Increase the share of student population studying science and engineering and ensure higher education follows an efficient system of vocational training and skills development, which feeds into the production of more technicians and engineers.
3. Strengthen the demand orientation of the courses taught and research carried out in the institutions of tertiary education to make them more relevant, location specific and embedded in local systems of production.
4. Increase opportunities and incentives for collaboration between industry and institutions of higher education.
5. Strengthen links with industry by getting industry players more involved in curriculum design, evaluation and innovation activities.
6. Focus more on African languages and other subjects which can support nation-building and national cohesion. In the field of social sciences, there is a need for economists, lawyers and accountants but also for anthropologists who can advise on the relationship between technology and social development.
7. Undertake regular and periodic tracer studies on the absorption of graduates into the labor market in order to help tertiary education institutions to undertake curriculum adjustments and innovation.
8. Make labour market analysis and a comprehensive labor market information system an integral part of the accreditation process.

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