

ADEQUACY AND LABOR MARKET-RELEVANCE OF GENERIC SKILLS ACQUIRED IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

Notably, there has been a change in demand for skills in the labour market in the past two decades as a response to change in technology which has brought about globalization of markets, international competition and a change in output demand. Progressively, more emphasis is placed on competence and display of quality generic skills in the workplace as against traditional degrees. Hence, the challenge to universities is to become adaptive to this change by preparing graduates with attributes and skills that are relevant in the workplace. It is therefore, important to find out how the universities in Nigeria have fared in meeting this challenge up till now.

The conventional way of doing this has been by considering employers view on the adequacy of skills supplied by their graduate employees through employers' survey. From past studies of employers' survey of performance of Nigerian university graduates, employers agree that the Nigerian graduates possessed a broad and respectable understanding of the knowledge base in technical disciplines, but they expressed gross dissatisfaction with their lack of preparation in those applied technical skills necessary for solving-problems and enhancing business productivity. Moving a bit from the convention, the present study considers the perception of employed University graduates themselves on the extent to which university education has prepared them in meeting the demands of their jobs. The result of this is believed to serve as one of the possible ways of assessing the market relevance of university education in Nigeria. Using purposive sampling technique, a total sample of 1,800 graduate employees and 600 management staff was purposively selected from three hundred Public and Private Organizations in the six geo-political zones in Nigeria. Two sets of questionnaires with reliability scores of 0.72 and 0.83 respectively were used for the study. With a four-point Likert rating scale, two research questions were answered and data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Chi-Square. The results show that employed university graduates believe that the quality of skills acquired in the university contributed just fairly to the skills needed in their workplaces. They rated all the skills below 2.0 (out of 4), except self-directed learning and numeracy skills. The employers also believe that graduates of all the fields of study (considered in the study) would require further training to a large extent to be able to cope with the challenges of their work.

The result of this study has implication for the relevance of university education, the private and social cost of education, and for the long-run economic growth of Nigeria. To guarantee quality enhancement of their graduates, Universities in Nigeria must be resolute in ensuring that the development of generic skills is addressed clearly in the curriculum. And like Bruner (1971) affirmed, if the current curriculum cannot respond adequately to this challenge, it should be changed, as "it is not enough to attempt reform through minor curriculum revisions; the program that fails to set knowledge within the context of action must be replaced."

Keywords: Demand for skills, Employed University graduates, Generic skills, Market relevance of university education, Need for further training, Nigeria.