

## Tackling Over-Schooling and Employability Challenges of Nigerian Graduates for National Development

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**Abstract.** Over-schooling and un-employability challenges bedevil graduates in Nigeria. Over-schooling breeds low productivity, job dissatisfaction, lack of motivation, poor human relations, violence and frustration. These portend danger for national development. This paper focuses on how to tackle over-schooling and un-employability in order to minimize the negative effects. The techniques proposed include acquisition of job creation and employability skills; sensitization of graduating class; overhauling of SIWES program and utilization of technology facilities for improved employability of graduates. When over-schooling and employability challenges of graduates are curtailed, there will be production of work-ready graduates and entrepreneurs; increased productivity and enhanced national development.

**Keywords:** Over-schooling, employability, challenges, Nigerian graduates, national development, tackling.

### 1. Introduction

Over-schooling and graduates unemployability phenomena are of grave concern to stakeholders in the education sector and the Nigerian populace. In literal terms, over-schooling means “schooled too-much”. Over-schooling is perceived as a condition in which an individual possesses many different certificates but fails to secure a stable job (Etuk, Akpan & Etuk, 2012). Such people spend several years moving from one university to the other, pursuing many

degrees and ending up being over-qualified for employment. Also, over-schooling refers to a condition whereby an individual occupies a job position that is below his qualification. The individual works below the optimum job level for his/her level of education (Glebbeck, 2011). Some Nigerian graduates have been able to secure jobs that are below their qualifications (just to make ends meet in time of hardship).

Often times, over-schoolers work in private establishments where the employers are handicapped in paying full benefits of workers. However, cases of over-schooling are also found in federal establishments, especially among non-academic staff in universities (Etuk, Akpan & Etuk, 2012). A worker’s extra certificate obtained while executing his/her job may not be recognized until he/she gets an opening that demands such a qualification. For instance, there are some university graduates working as security guards or clerks. The knowledge and skills acquired by such over-schooled graduates are being underutilized and resources spent in training appear wasted. Since over-schooled graduates are often underpaid, the resultant effects are low productivity and job dissatisfaction.

Employability refers to the attributes, skills and abilities possessed by an individual that allow him/her to secure and maintain a job. It is a case of unemployability when an individual seeking employment possesses attributes that do not meet the demands of the job. Studies have shown that some Nigerian graduates are poorly

trained, ill-equipped, lack necessary competencies for job creation and employment and are unproductive on the job (Dabaleni, Oni & Adekola, 2000; Amaewhule, 2007; Nwangwu, 2007). For instance, in this technology era, some job aptitude tests and interviews are conducted via computers. The implication is that, a graduate that does not possess computer skills is rendered unemployable. Also, some students are not well exposed to industry practices while in school and so fail to meet the expectations of industries after school. It is a case of unemployability when, for instance, a graduate of Wood-work Engineering is unable to demonstrate the practical know-how of designing a table.

Unemployability and over-schooling, if not curtailed, can hinder national development. They breed frustration, low-morale, job dissatisfaction and anxieties. A worker lacking job satisfaction exhibits traits like anger, poor human relations and low output (Tsang, 1987; Ng, 2000). Also, conflicts and violence trail over-schooled and unemployable graduates. It is against this backdrop that this paper focuses on tackling over-schooling and employability problems of graduates in Nigeria in order to enhance national development.

## 2. Concept of Over-Schooling

Over-schooling can be seen from different perspectives. Firstly, over-schooling is conceived as acquisition of many certificates without stable employment (Etuk, et al., 2012). Secondly, over-schooling is perceived as a situation in which public and private universities churn out large number of graduates that overwhelm the labour market (Udoh, Joseph & Amajuoyi, 2014; Green, McIntosh & Vingnoles, 1999). Thirdly, over-schooling is when an individual works below his qualification (Glebbeck, 2011) and is underpaid.

From a psychological perspective, over-schooling challenge is hinged on Herzberg's (1971) 2-factor theory of motivation and Abraham Maslow's (1943; 1954) Hierarchy of Needs Motivation theory. Herzberg (1971), in his study, found that company's policies,

working conditions and salaries were some contributory factors to job dissatisfaction among workers. The implication is that motivation factors influence workers' job satisfaction and performance. Also, Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs motivation theory proposed that satisfying the lowest needs, namely, physiological needs such as food, water, air and shelter helps man to function effectively in the society. Motivation is highly associated with emotions which in turn influences actions of individuals (Abeshi, 2012; Balarabe, 2012; Plotnik and Kouyoumdjian, 2011). When the basic needs of workers are not met, they are not motivated to put in their best at work. Such workers tend to accumulate certificates in order to explore better job opportunities.

Over-schoolers receive low income, are handicapped in providing adequately for the education, welfare and health needs of their families. They lack the means to make meaningful contributions to the society. Consequently, emotions of fear, sadness and anger set in, influencing over-schoolers' output. This impairs national development. It is necessary to seek ways of tackling over-schooling challenges among working and non-working Nigerian graduates.

## 3. Concept of Employability

Employability is a measure of how easily graduates can gain employment and achieve success in the world of work. Employability focuses on a set of achievements, skills, understanding and personal attributes possessed by graduates that make them more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen careers. Hillage and Pollard (1998) defined employability as an individual's ability to gain initial employment, move between roles within the same organization, obtain new employment if required and secure suitable and fulfilling work. Furthermore, DHFETE (2002) proposed that employability is the capability to move into and within labour markets and to realize potentials through sustainable and accessible employment.

According to Etuk et al (2012), there has been a steady decline in the rate of graduate employment for reasons ranging from paucity of employment opportunities to increased unemployability of university graduates. The need to tackle employability challenges of graduates is therefore prominent.

#### 4. Causes of Graduate Unemployability

There are many factors responsible for graduate unemployability. QUORA (2017) and Nnaike (2018) have proposed the underlisted as causes of graduate unemployability:

- **Over-saturated career paths chosen.** Some graduates specialize in over-saturated areas e.g. Business Administration, Mass Communication while few possess certificates in courses like computer programming, cyber security etc.
- **Inability to apply information previously learnt to solve daily problems.** Sometimes, lecturers do not use teaching methods that allow students to make good use of the ideas learnt after school or later in life.
- **Lack of creative and innovative thinking skills.** Sometimes, students fail to develop knowledge and skills previously acquired to meet present day needs. They fail to engage their creative skills.
- **Lack of necessary employability skills such as professionalism, good oral and written communication.** Mediocre students are sometimes churned out of the universities. For instance, there are some graduates that cannot write error-free memos in simple English language in the offices; or some journalists that cannot differentiate between “former” and “formal”.
- **Failure of Students’ Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) to bridge the gap between universities and industries.** Some students undertake SIWES program in companies lacking infrastructural and workshop facilities

that can give them required experiences for labour market.

- **Large number of graduates.** Public and private universities turn out large number of graduates, more than what the labour market can accommodate.
- **Globalization policies.** Government is not eager to establish more industries because of globalization policies worldwide. More industries can help to accommodate employment needs of many graduates in the society.
- **Poor funding of Education by Government.** Nigerian budgetary allocation to Education sector has been below 26% UNESCO benchmark for years. Poor funding leads to provision of inadequate infrastructures, laboratories, workshops, overcrowded lecture, inability to make use of modern and technological facilities in improving teaching and learning that can enable graduates acquire employability skills.

#### 5. Techniques of Tackling Overschooling and Employability Problems of Graduates

The following techniques should be utilized in tackling over-schooling and employability problems of Nigerian graduates.

- **Upgrading overschooled staff:** Employers of labour should upgrade over-schooled staff to higher cadres upon successful performance in aptitude or screening tests.
- **Job creation skills:** In training graduates, acquisition of educational certificates for job seeking should be de-emphasized while emphasis is placed on skills’ acquisition for job creation.
- **Employability skills:** Workshops and laboratories in institutions of higher learning should be well-equipped to meet industry standard so that students can be well-exposed to industry practices. Also, experts from the industries can be invited to train students in the effective use of the materials or equipment. These help graduates to acquire employability skills.

- **Sensitization of graduating class:** Graduating classes in tertiary institutions of learning should be given periodic orientation, sensitization and counseling sessions on vocational, career and entrepreneurship opportunities after school as well as to expose them to the demands and expectations of employers. Seminars and workshops can be used to provide such awareness.

- **Periodic review of curriculum:** There should be periodic review of curriculum for tertiary institutions by experts, to keep abreast of new developments. Experts in the industries should also be invited to make contributions to the review.

- **Over-hauling of SIWES programs:** SIWES programs in schools should be overhauled to include programs and experiences that will bridge the gap between universities and industries. There should be proper and adequate supervision of students on SIWES programs to ensure that they are kept busy learning and practicing industrial tasks on the field. The practice of just signing SIWES students' log books for formality sake by some Supervisors should be discarded.

- **Loan schemes:** Centre for Entrepreneurship Studies in various universities can source for grants to mount loan schemes for Alumni members to engage in business activities, under supervision. The Centre can also sensitize on how to secure loans for entrepreneurship purposes through provision of more avenues for securing loans.

- **Establishment of more industries:** Private individuals, organizations and government should set up more industries and companies to employ many job seekers and pay them adequate salaries that match their qualifications.

- **Technology facilities for improved employability:** Technology and internet facilities can be used to enhance employability. Universities should form partnerships with other universities in other countries for exchange of experts from overseas to Nigeria and vice versa. Also, using online facilities, undergraduate students in Nigeria can be trained by foreign experts via virtual learning facilities like SKYPE and video-conferencing.

- **Self-development of graduates:** Graduates need to engage in self-development in order to

build on already-acquired skills from schools. Individuals can boost the acquired skills through constant practice and getting more information online about the area of specialization. A graduate should consider what he/she can do better than others with the same qualification. The onus lies on a graduate to develop himself or herself beyond the basic skills or training acquired in school, through constant practices and creative thinking/activities. Such a graduate is bound to 'stand out' among his/her peers and attract employability offers.

## 6. Conclusion

Nigerian graduates struggle with over-schooling and employability challenges. The causal factors and consequences have been highlighted. Minimizing over-schooling requires all stakeholders namely, government, school administrators, employers of labour and individuals to play their roles. In tackling the menace of over-schooling and unemployability, the techniques and recommendations given in this paper should be considered. Minimizing over-schooling and unemployability will enhance national development.

## 7. Recommendations

- Over-schooled and potential over-schooled individuals without stable jobs should be encouraged to specialize in a specific area and master necessary skills in that area.

- Undergraduates' trainings should be tailored towards job creation and employability.

- Regular seminars and workshops should be organized for final year university students to sensitize them about how to overcome over-schooling and employability problems.

- Government should promote entrepreneurship and creative business skills by providing more avenues for obtaining loans.

- Education should be properly funded by government, to provide adequate infrastructural facilities, instructional and workshop materials for schools to improve employability.

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