



# JOURNAL OF EVALUATION

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VOLUME 6 NO 1 JULY, 2021  
ISSN : 2616-0897



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# FACTORS DETERMINING UNIVERSITY GRADUATES EMPLOYABILITY AS EXPRESSED BY EMPLOYERS OF LABOUR IN KWARASTATE, NIGERIA

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## Abstract

*Higher education graduates' unemployment constitutes major problems to the labour market and raises questions on the credibility of tertiary education particularly in developing and underdeveloped nations. Over the years the phenomenon of university graduate unemployment has compelled different groups in Nigeria to stage various strategies in order to ensure possible solutions to the situation. This study examined expression of employers of labour in Kwara State, Nigeria on factors determining graduate employability. The study adopted the descriptive survey method through the use of structured questionnaire, which was entitled 'Factors Determining Graduate Employability Questionnaire' (FDGEQ). The instrument has a reliability coefficient of 0.77r. The purposive and stratified sampling techniques were used to select 152 employers of labour that participated in the study. The USEM Model on employability was adopted for the study. The results revealed that skills in modern technology and ability to communicate adequately are the topmost factors determining graduate employability. In addition age (between 18 and 30 years) and knowledge of entrepreneurship are also germane in determining graduate employability. Based on the findings, it was recommended that universities should deliberately mandate all undergraduates to undertake courses in modern technology and entrepreneurial education in order to guarantee employability of graduates.*

**Key Words:** Factors, Determining, Graduate Employability, Employers of Labour, Expression

## Introduction

Unemployment of higher education graduates has become one of the most devastating challenges confronting many countries across the globe, particular since the era of economic meltdown in the recent time. The phenomenon is significantly ravaging the underdeveloped and developing countries among which are large number of African countries, including nations in the West African sub-region. More worrisome is the yearly increase in the number of unemployed university graduates, which has continued to pose conspicuous threat to the existence of many nations, particular Nigeria, and creating major obstacles to meaningful development. Unemployment can be viewed as the state of joblessness experienced by individuals



who are members of the labour force who perceived themselves and others as capable of work (Shadare & Elegbede, 2012). This submission is a typical description of the situation of unemployed graduates in Nigeria and elsewhere in most cases.

The major goals of higher education in Nigeria, as contained in the National Policy on Education are to contribute to national development through high level manpower (graduates) training and to provide high quality career counselling and life-long learning programs that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for entering into the world of work (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2014). The document further stated that University education shall make optimum contribution by intensifying and diversifying its programs for the development of high level manpower of the nation. These goals of university education informed the expectations of the graduates and the society in general on certainty of employment for university graduates after completing their studies. However, the expectations have become an illusion in the face of already saturated labour market coupled with unfriendly economic climate in the country over the years. Ajiboye, Oyebanji and Awoniyi (2013) stated that the nature of graduate unemployment is changing: it is only a small fraction of graduates that can hold any realistic expectation of employment in a desired field of career. The scenario of the labour market in Nigeria at present is that graduates are poorly prepared for work because they lack good communication skills and technical competence in basic technology (Shadare & Elegbede, 2012).

The phenomenon of university graduate employability in Nigeria involves the role of different groups, particularly employers of labour. This category include sole or joint business owners, individuals who are at the helm of affairs and involve in decision making (including employment) process in various establishments, whether public or private sector. These individuals might have been in such position for a long period of time or otherwise, which makes their view towards graduates' employability imminent.

Employability is multifaceted and so also are its conflict grounds. While employers may feel that the universities have not been giving adequate specific and generic skills training to their students to make them employable, other stakeholders (parents, graduates, lecturers etc.) argue that employers should take responsibility of providing work place training for the graduates after employment instead of allowing them to be engaged in unwholesome activities (Paadi, 2014). Fearn (2009), while considering factors that could facilitate graduate employability, suggested that the best way to make a graduate globally employable is by putting a lot of pressure on students to develop the skills involved in digesting tense and difficult materials, teasing out argumentative structure and then producing powerful, clear, argumentative analysis. Knight and Yorke (2004) defined employability as a set of achievement skills, understandings and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits them, the workforce, the community and the economy. Knight and Yorke developed a model of employment called USEM (Understanding, Skills, Efficacy and



Meta-cognition with interrelations among the variables as appear below.

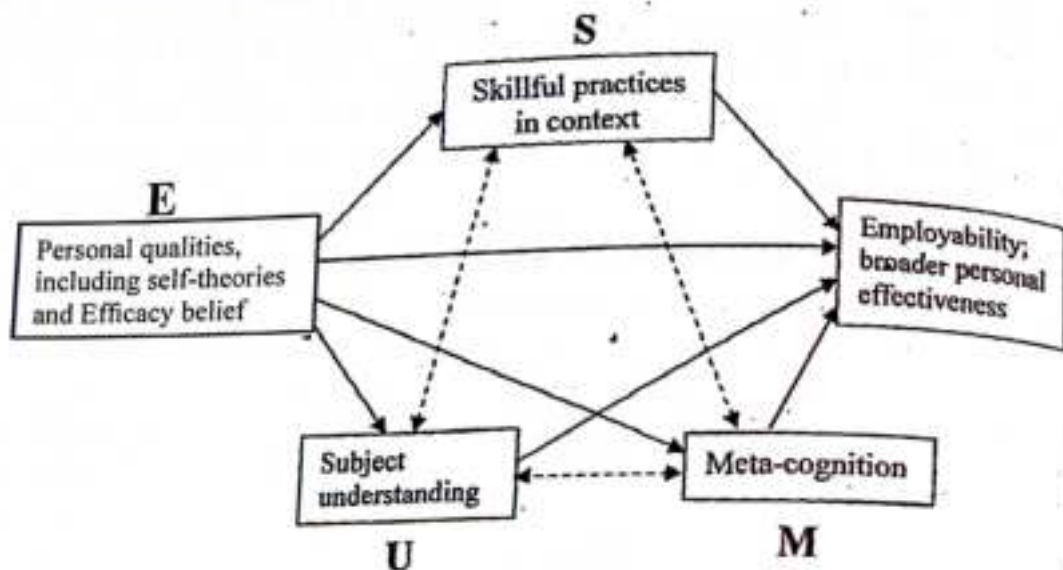


Fig. 1: Knight and Yorke (2004) USEM model of employability.  
 (Source: Cole & Tibby, 2012) *The Higher Education Academy*.

The interplay among the factors (variables) analyzed in the model suggests that E (Efficacy, beliefs) which depicts personal qualities produces S (Skills), which depicts skillful practices and U (Understanding), which depicts subject understanding. Furthermore E links directly to M (Metacognition) while all interplay to produce employability (E). The summary of this model is that, skills (such as in technology and communication), efficacy (such as self-confidence to work with others), meta-cognition (such as adequate knowledge of different factors) and understanding (that is, ability to comprehend ideas) are predetermining factors for graduates employability. Employers of labour could be individuals in public or private sector. Those in public sector are the individuals employed by the State, that is, government at different levels while those in the private are employed by organisations other than the ones directly controlled by the government such private schools and industries. Examples of public sector include ministries, parastatals and government-owned institutions. Both public and private have categories of workers in terms of years of experience and career cadre. These variables play significant roles in the individuals' views on different phenomena in the society particular in relation employability.

Graduating from the University and being able to secure an employment has phenomenally become an ordinary day-dream over the years. This is occasioned by the long existence of economic crisis bedeviling many countries and particularly Nigeria (Ajiboye, Oyebanji and Awoniyi, 2013). The matter is made worse by the yearly large turnout of graduates without the corresponding job vacancies to absorb them. Shadare and Elegbede (2012) and Edinyang, Odey and Gimba (2015) inferred that the level of university graduate unemployment in Nigeria has reached alarming



rate. Precision Consultancy (2007), Babalola (2011), Pan and Lee (2011), and Ajiboye, Oyebanji and Awoniyi (2013) found that the prominent factors influencing graduate employability are ability to use modern technology, ability to relate well with other people, high communication dexterity, and knowledge and skills in enterprises (entrepreneurship). Shadare and Elegbede (2012) equally reported that, in the UK, higher education graduates with adequate skills in software engineering and use were nearly twice unlikely to be unemployed in 6 months after graduation unlike others that lack such skills. In another study, Eurostat (2014) found that 60% of graduates with skills in technology in Slovenia found a job within 3 month after leaving the school. In a study, Ajiboye, Oyebanji and Awoniyi (2013) reported that the respondents (lecturers) were similar in their perception of influence of higher education on employability on the basis of length of service. However, significant difference was found in the perception of respondents based on faculty. The present study investigated factors determining university graduates employability as expressed by employers of labour in Kwara State, Nigeria.

### **Research Question**

What are the factors determining graduate employability as expressed by employers of labour in Kwara State, Nigeria?

### **Hypotheses**

- H<sub>01</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the expressions regarding factors determining university graduates' employability between employers of labour in the public and private sectors in Kwara State, Nigeria.
- H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no significant difference in the expressions regarding factors determining university graduates' employability between employers of labour with 1-10 years of experience and those above 10 years of experience on employers' cadre in Kwara State, Nigeria.

### **Methodology**

The descriptive survey method of quantitative type was adopted for this study. The researcher purposively selected a sample size of 152 respondents who were considered as employers of labour because they occupied managerial positions in both public and private sectors and involved in decision making on employment. The selection of 104 participants in the public service was carried out in different ministries and agencies while that of 48 participants in private establishments was done in privately owned schools and industries. A total of 96 employers of labour with 1-10 years of experience and 56 with above 10 years of experience were selected through stratified sampling technique. The instrument used to collect the required data was entitled "Factors Determining Graduate Employability Questionnaire (FDGEQ)". The instrument was patterned in the four-point Likert scale format of Strongly Agree (4 points); Agree (3 points); Disagree (2 points); and Strongly Disagreed (1 point). In scoring, the mid-point is 2.50 ( $4+3+2+1=10/4$ ). Thus, any item

with a mean score from 2.50 and above was considered a significant factor determining graduate employability while below was considered otherwise. In order to determine the reliability of the instrument, it was subjected to the test re-test method and a coefficient value of 0.77 was obtained. The researcher personally administered the questionnaire forms to the respondents after obtaining their consent on participation. The measure of central tendency (mean) and the t-test were used to analyze the data while the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level.

## Results

**Research Question:** *What are the factors determining graduate employability as expressed by employers of labour in Kwara State, Nigeria?*

**Table 1:** Mean, Scores and Rank Order of factors determining graduate employability

Statement	Mean Score	Rank
<i>Employability of Graduates is Determined by:</i>		
skills in modern technology	3.16	1 <sup>st</sup>
ability to communicate effectively	3.11	2 <sup>nd</sup>
knowledge of entrepreneurship	3.04	3 <sup>rd</sup>
age at graduation (between 18 and 30 years)	2.97	4 <sup>th</sup>
emotional stability	2.94	5 <sup>th</sup>
fluency in speaking English language	2.89	5 <sup>th</sup>
previous job experience	2.86	7 <sup>th</sup>
academic discipline	2.82	8 <sup>th</sup>
ability to work with others	2.78	9 <sup>th</sup>
class of degree obtained	2.75	10 <sup>th</sup>
physical appearance	2.70	11 <sup>th</sup>
willingness to accept financial benefits offered	2.69	12 <sup>th</sup>
multilingual proficiency	2.66	13 <sup>th</sup>
economic strength of the country	2.64	14 <sup>th</sup>
high level of creative skill	2.61	15 <sup>th</sup>

The result shows that all the items have mean scores above the mid-point (2.50), which was the decision point. This indicates that respondents alluded to all the items as being factors determining graduate employability. Nevertheless, the most prominent are: skills in modern technology, ability to communicate effectively and knowledge of entrepreneurship.

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference in the expressions regarding factors determining university graduates' employability between employers of labour in the public and private sectors in Kwara State, Nigeria.



**Table 2:** Result of t-test statistics comparing expression of respondents graduate employability

Sector	No	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t.	p-val
Public	104	51.14	9.26	150	2.61*	0.000
Private	48	53.70	8.01			

\*Significant;  $p < 0.05$

The result shows that the p-value (0.000) is less than the alpha level (0.05). The null hypothesis is therefore not accepted but the alternative hypothesis. Thus, there is significant difference in the expressions regarding factors determining university graduates' employability between employers of labour in the public and private sectors in Kwara State, Nigeria. Respondents from private sector differed significantly (mean=53.70) compared to those from public sector (mean=51.14).

**Hypothesis Two:** There is no significant difference in the expressions regarding factors determining university graduates' employability between employers of labour with 1-10 years and those above 10 years of experience on employers' cadre in Kwara State, Nigeria

**Table 3:** Result of t-test statistics comparing expression of respondents based on duration on cadre as employer.

Duration on the Cadre	No	Mean	SD	df	Cal. t.	p-val
1-10 years	96	53.16	7.41	150	2.24*	0.02
Above 10 years	56	50.81	8.33			

\*Significant;  $p < 0.05$

The result on Table 3 reveals that the p-value (0.02) is less than the alpha level (0.05); hence the null hypothesis was not accepted. There is significant difference in the expressions regarding factors determining university graduates' employability between employers of labour with 1-10 years of experience and those above 10 years of experience on employers' cadre in Kwara State, Nigeria. Employers of labour with 1-10 years of experience (mean=53.16) accounted for the significant difference compared with respondents having work experience above 10 years as appeared in table 3.

### Discussion of Findings

The analysis revealed that the respondents subscribed to all the items as being factors determining university graduates employability. However, the topmost factors determining graduate employability are: skills in the use of modern technology; ability to communicate effectively; and knowledge of entrepreneurship. This finding is in consonance with the studies of Precision Consultancy (2007), Babalola (2011), Pan and Lee (2011), and Ajiboye, Oyebanji and Awoniyi (2013) where it was found



that knowledge of modern science, skills and competencies in communication, modern Technology and ability in the field of enterprise are key factors that influenced employment of higher education graduates. Eurostat (2014) also reported that 60% of graduates with skills in technology in Slovenia found a job within 3 months, compared to others without such ability. It was also reported that in the UK, higher education graduates with adequate skills in software engineering and use were nearly twice unlikely to be unemployed six months after graduation like others without same skills (Edinyang, Odey & Gimba, 2015). The findings of the present study showed that employers of labour would give preference to graduates who has high dexterity in technology, proficiency in communication and enterprise since these factors significantly translates to the hub of quality delivery. Other factors determining employability of university graduates as expressed by employers of labour include age at graduation, emotional stability, fluency in speaking English language, previous job experience, academic discipline and class of degree among others.

There was significant difference in the expressions regarding factors determining university graduates' employability between employers of labour in the public and private sectors in Kwara State, Nigeria. Respondents from private sector have higher means (53.70) against those from public (51.14). In a related study, Ajiboye, Oyebanji and Awoniyi (2013) equally found significant difference in the perception of lecturers on influence of higher education on employability based on faculty. The reason for the similarity in the findings of both the previous studies could be the fact that individuals with different job orientations are unlikely to express similar view about employability. One reason that might accounted for having higher expression from employers in private sector could be as a result of the nature of their services which require attracting clients/consumers, hence the need to consider many factors before employing graduates.

There was significant difference in the expressions regarding factors determining university graduates' employability between employers of labour with 1-10 years of experience and those above 10 years of experience on employers' cadre in Kwara State, Nigeria. This result disagrees with Ajiboye, Oyebanji and Awoniyi (2013) who found no significant difference in the influence of higher education on employability as perceived by lecturers based on length of service. The reason for the dissimilarity between the studies could be because of the difference in their scope: the previous was limited to lecturer while the present focused on employers of labour in both the public and private sectors.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Considering the results of the study, one may draw several conclusions among which are that there are numerous factors determining university graduates employability but the most prominent are: skills in modern technology; ability to communicate effectively and knowledge of entrepreneurship. Others are emotional stability, age at graduation (between 18 and 30 years); and fluency in speaking



English Language (the *lingua franca* in Nigeria). Thus, if these attributes could be found among university graduates, the problems of unemployment would be adequately addressed and the role of University education would be positively felt in the overall attainment of the lofty goals of higher education in Nigeria. In addition, employers of labour differed in their expression of factors determining graduate employability based on nature of sector and years of experience employers of labour cadre.

Based on the conclusion drawn, the following recommendations were made in order:

- Universities should deliberately mandate all undergraduates to undertake courses in modern technology;
- Entrepreneurial education should be made compulsory for all undergraduates in order to enhance their skills in enterprise;
- Counselling psychologists and professionals from allied fields should synergize in order to train undergraduates on the skills that enhance emotional stability and effective communication skills;
- Employers of labour in the private sector should be encouraged to compliment university education by employing graduates and focus more on on-the-job capacity building training to cater for possible deficiencies that might prevent graduate employment; and
- There should be synergy between employers of labour and universities within same locality to plan the academic program that will suit employment requirements of the various sectors in order to guarantee graduate employments.

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