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## CREATING A SYNERGY BETWEEN UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM AND LABOUR MARKET IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*A lot of critics of the curriculum of Nigeria tertiary institutions especially universities often assert that the programmes (curriculum) leave the graduates poorly prepared for the labour market. In other words, the products lack sufficient skills and competences required in the labour market. Most research works in the universities do not seem to have paid much attention to the effects of the university programmes and labour market outcomes. Specifically the paper attempts to examine the adequacy and effectiveness of university programme (curriculum) and its relationship with the labour market requirements and demands. Three research questions and three hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. The paper employs a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprises two states in the south west geographical zone of Nigeria. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques are employed to get a total of 300 participants. The instrument for data collection is questionnaire. Document and content analysis are used for further scrutiny. Quantitative and qualitative analysis are used. The paper employed percentile, "t"-test and Pearson product moment correlation to treat the data collected. Some of the findings of the study are that there is a disconnection between the curriculum in Nigeria universities and labour market demands. The paper provides a better insight into the skills and competences required by the labour market. The paper recommends among others, the need for urgent review of the present university curriculum to align with what is required in the labour market.*

**Keywords:** Synergy, Curriculum, Labour market, competences and skills, university

### Introduction

In recent times the way curriculum is understood and theorised has been altered. The concept of curriculum has become broader, increasingly changing from a static document indicating the subject knowledge to be acquired at the completion

of an academic year, towards a dynamic comprehensive framework embracing for example, occupational standards and defining learning outcomes, assessment procedures and teaching and training methods. This evolution explains why today there is little agreement on where curriculum ends

and education learning and training begins (Psifidon 2009 in Cedaop 2010). Educationists and stakeholders perceived curriculum as a dynamic framework guiding teaching and learning process and a steering mechanism for quality. Curriculum is also being used as an instrument to foster more learner-centred approaches in education and training and to successfully match education and training provision to labour market needs (European Council 2008).

In Nigeria the clamour for transformation in total fabric of the society is enormous cutting across politics, economic and education. This is obvious in view of the rapid changes and external frameworks the entire world is facing. Education particularly university education is the centre of this transformation. The transformation of the university education has been characterised by an expansion in the number of students and university graduates, (from the eighties onwards) and the introduction of quality assurance policies through National Universities Commission (NUC) accreditation exercise. The question that is on the lips of stakeholders is the extent to which university curriculum matches with the labour market demands. This is important because it appears the university curriculum does not seem to meet up with the requirements of the new economy and present-day labour markets, mainly with regards to the introduction of competences that is skills, as a fundamental learning objective in the study programmes.

Globalization has made it necessary for graduates of universities in the country to remain in the universities as long as possible and gain adequate experience in various cultural and labour contexts and university training affords the receipts the alternative job opportunities and opened up possibilities for specialised training. To a large extent, university education is seen by majority of the people as a solution for securing stable employment and avoiding unemployment. It

appears that the issue here has to do with different education and not that of more education. Different education in this case goes beyond the mastery of basic subject matter, numeracy and literacy, success in the new economy requires behavioural skills such as the ability to think critically communicate well and work effectively in teams. In addition, there are some concepts that are becoming increasingly important and they are creativity, risk-taking, entrepreneurship and flexibility in the face of change (Myer and Myer, 2000)

University education is so crucial and critical in the sense that it remains the centre for the production, training and re-training of high level manpower. The development of a nation (be it economic, social, political etc) forms the bedrock of university education. Since education is inextricably tied to curriculum, no wonder curricularists assert that no curriculum no education (Pratt 1994, Igwe 2007, Pinar 1995).

The place of curriculum in making education functional cannot be ignored. A functional curriculum should address human needs, prepare the students (beneficiaries) for the world of work, develop their cognitive abilities etc, ensure that little or no dichotomy exists between the world of classroom and world of work. As pointed out by O'Toole (1979), there is need for educators in schools, colleges and universities to make education more relevant to the world of work.

Suffice it to say that the quality of graduates and the level of competences acquired will determine to a large extent the quality of labour and level of productivity of any country. This is buttressed by Oriafio (1997) when he observed that: the expenditure on education has not yielded the expected benefits in terms of the well-being of the individual, an enhanced standard of living and the overall development of the nation. The purpose of the school is not matching anticipated technical efficiency. The quality of learning and professional out-put from the school system is not in alignment



with expected public service orientation, professional commitment and productivity.

The pressure exerted by various labour market representatives has called for the universities to adopt policies and strategies that could align with social demand. The major issue the study attempts to resolve is the adequate linking of the distinct world of university curriculum and labour market demand. This seems to be crucial because policy-makers and curriculum developers would want to establish bridges which would eliminate the gap between these two sectors.

#### Statement of the Problem

It is rather becoming increasingly difficult for products of universities to get employment in the labour market. It appears the university curriculum content in Nigeria is not attuned to the developmental needs of the country and seems not to be sufficiently flexible to adapt to changing demands that encourage lifelong learning. The difficulties faced by the young graduates in finding jobs are compounded by large numbers seeking limited employment opportunities. This explains why many young graduates roam the labour market in search of jobs.

Today professional competences and employability of graduates from the Nigerian universities call for serious scrutiny as the graduates from these higher institutions are not employable; in other words they lack requisite knowledge, skills and attitudes required in the labour market. This raises questions on the curriculum (that is subject offerings, content and method of delivery).

Curriculum at any level of education has to be responsive to changing social conditions and a curriculum which does not embody the process of continuous search for change is bound to become irrelevant, out-modelled and therefore of little use (Igwe 2011). This accentuates the need to review university curriculum and labour market demands is imminent

The study examines the extent to which the university curriculum is in alignment with the requirements and demands of the Nigeria labour market, identifies the areas of discrepancies, ascertain the skills, competences required by the labour market and attempts to propose a new study structure to promote employability and facilitate academic recognition as a basis for further studies and employment.

#### Research Questions

1. To what extent does the university curriculum (content delivery) align with the labour market demand?
2. What are the areas of discrepancies between the university curriculum and labour market demand?
3. What competences are needed by graduates when entering the labour market in their search for employment?

#### Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference between the university curriculum and labour market
2. There is no significant difference between the theoretical knowledge taught in the university and the practicality demanded by the labour market
3. There is no significant relationship between the skills and competences taught in the university and those required by the labour market

#### Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population was made up of all the unemployed graduates in the South-West of Nigeria and the employees and employers of public and private enterprise.

The stratified and simple random sampling techniques were employed. The sample consisted of 300 participants drawn from two states in the South-West geo-political zone of the country. About

183 participants (unemployed) were selected from the National Directorate for Employment (NDE), and 117 participants from the public and private sectors (employees / employers) from the ministries, banks, and industries.

Questionnaire and interview were the instruments for data collection. The questionnaire comprised two sections: (a) bio-data and (b) the test items. The participants were to rate the questionnaire using a three-point scale of Agreed, Disagreed and Uncertain. The content of the questionnaire was validated by Curriculumists and Educationalists. The Cronbach's Alpha reliability statistics was 0.74. This indicates that there is high internal consistency among the items in the instrument.

Furthermore, the document/content analysis of the curriculum of the universities from selected courses was carried out. Percentile, T-test, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation were used to treat the data.

## Results

Table 1: Some of the competences required by graduates when entering the labour market in their search for employment?

Item	Views	A	%	D	%	UD	%	Response Mean	Mean Scale	SD	CV	Remarks
Capacity to learn fast	Unemployed	162	88.5	17	9.3	-	-	1.91	1.5	0.294	0.154	Agree
	Employee / Employer	103	88.0	10	8.5	4	3.4	1.85	1.5	0.448	0.242	Agree
Problem solving	Unemployed	158	86.3	25	13.7	-	-	1.86	1.5	0.344	0.185	Agree
	Employee / Employer	96	82.1	21	17.9	-	-	1.82	1.5	0.385	0.212	Agree
Capacity for applying knowledge in practice	Unemployed	172	94.0	11	6.0	-	-	1.94	1.5	0.238	0.123	Agree
	Employee / Employer	109	93.2	8	6.8	-	-	1.93	1.5	0.253	0.131	Agree
Capacity to adapt to new situation	Unemployed	163	89.1	18	9.3	2	1.1	1.88	1.5	0.358	0.190	Agree

Research question 1: To what extent does the university curriculum (content delivery) align with the labour market?

Analysis of data shows that almost all the participants (unemployed and employees / employers) agree that university curriculum (knowledge) is adequate.

Research question 2: What are the areas of discrepancies between the university curriculum and labour market demand?

In the area of discrepancies between university curriculum and labour market demand, 30% of the unemployed participants agreed that there are areas of discrepancies while 70% of the employees / employers agreed that there are areas of differences between university curriculum and labour market demands.

Research question 3: What competences are needed by graduates when entering the labour market in their search for employment?



Concern for quality	Employee / Employer	109	93.2	8	6.8	-	-	1.83	1.5	0.378	0.207	Agree
	Unemployed	152	83.1	26	14.2	5	2.7	1.80	1.5	0.462	0.257	Agree
Information management skills (ICT)	Employee / Employer	97	82.9	20	17.1	-	-	1.82	1.5	0.385	0.212	Agree
	Unemployed	174	95.1	9	4.9	-	-	1.95	1.5	0.217	0.111	Agree
Ability to work autonomously (independently)	Employee / Employer	108	92.3	9	7.7	-	-	1.82	1.5	0.268	0.140	Agree
	Unemployed	157	85.8	17	9.3	6	3.3	1.84	1.5	0.450	0.244	Agree
Team work	Employee / Employer	105	89.7	12	10.3	-	-	1.90	1.5	0.305	0.161	Agree
	Unemployed	156	85.2	25	13.7	-	-	1.86	1.5	0.346	0.186	Agree
Practical skill to enable one cope with change	Employee / Employer	106	90.6	11	9.4	-	-	1.91	1.5	0.293	0.153	Agree
	Unemployed	180	93.4	3	1.6	-	-	1.93	1.5	0.127	0.064	Agree
Professional knowledge and skills to raise employability	Employee/ Employer	97	82.9	20	17.1	-	-	1.83	1.5	0.378	0.207	Agree
	Unemployed	151	82.5	26	14.2	6	3.3	1.79	1.5	0.481	0.269	Agree
Pooled	Employee / Employer	111	94.9	6	5.1	-	-	1.95	1.5	0.222	0.114	Agree
	Unemployed	163	88.8	18	9.7	2	1.0	1.88	1.5	0.331	0.176	Agree
	Employee / Employer	104	89.0	13	10.7	1	0.3	1.89	1.5	0.312	0.177	Agree
	Unemployed											

In the case of competences and skills required when entering the labour market, all the participants (unemployed and employees / employers) agreed that all the items listed in the table above are highly required when entering the labour market.

In order to determine the existing relationship between the variables in the hypotheses, the data collected from the participants were analysed accordingly and the results are as shown below:

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference between university curriculum and labour market demand

**Table 2: Unemployed and employees / employers view on university curriculum and labour market demand**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	LS	P-Value	Decision
University curriculum		1.65	0.393	0.05		
and	300				0.021	
Labour market		1.68	0.212			Rejected

Source: Field work

The calculated t-value is -2.335 and the p value 0.021 less than 0.05 level of significance shows that there is a significant difference between the university curriculum and labour market demand. Hence, the null hypothesis one which states that there is no significant difference between university curriculum and the labour market is rejected.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference between the theoretical knowledge taught in the university and the practicality demanded by the labour market

**Table 3a: Unemployed and employees / employers views on theoretical knowledge taught and practicality demanded by the labour market**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	LS	P-Value	Decision
Theoretical Knowledge						
and	300	1.60	0.299	0.05	0.01	
						Rejected
Practicality demanded by						
Labour market		1.73	0.216			

Source: Field work

The calculated t-value is -1.059 and the p-value is 0.01 less than 0.05 level of significance shows that there is a significant difference between the theoretical knowledge taught and the practicality demanded in the labour market.

**Table 3b: Analysis of unemployed and employees / employers views on theoretical knowledge taught and practicality demanded by the labour market**

Variables	N	Mean	SD	CD	LS	P-Value	Decision
Theoretical Knowledge	183						
and		1.60	0.299	0.5	0.05	0.241	
							Rejected
Practicality demanded by							
Labour market	117	1.70	0.288				
	300	3.30	0.587				



Source: Field Work

The calculated *r*-value is 0.87 and the *p*-value is 0.241 less than 0.05 level of significance. This shows that there is a significant relationship between the theoretical knowledge taught and the practicality demanded in the labour market.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant relationship between the skills and competence taught in the university and those required in the labour market.

Table 4a: Unemployed and employees / employers view on skills and competence taught and those required in the labour market

Variables	N	Mean	SD	LS	P-Value	Decision
Skills & competence and Labour market	300	1.87	0.161	0.05	0.01	Rejected
		1.76	0.315			

Source: Field Work

The calculated *t*-value is 3.474 and the *p*-value is 0.01 less than 0.05 level of significance. This shows

that there is a significant difference between the skills and competence taught and those required in the labour market.

Table 4b: Analysis of unemployed and employees / employers view on skills and competence taught and those required in the labour market demand

Variables	N	Mean	SD	CD	LS	P-Value	Decision
Skills & competence and Labour market demand	183	1.89	0.164	0.4	0.05	0.008	Rejected
Total	300	3.76	0.325				

Source: Field work

The calculated *r*-value is 0.154 and the *p*-value is 0.098 greater than 0.05 level of significance shows that there is a positive significant relationship between the skills and competence taught and those required in the labour market.

### Discussion

The findings of the study in relation to university curriculum and labour market demand revealed that majority of the participants agreed to the adequacy of the provision of knowledge in the university curriculum

This was confirmed with t-test statistical analysis which showed that there is no significant difference between unemployed and employees / employers opinions about the adequacy of the theoretical knowledge of the curriculum of the universities.

Okenuga (2013), in her work on comparative analysis of competences in undergraduate chemistry curriculum and job competence by chemical based industries buttressed this view but was quick to point out the inadequacies in the curriculum in terms of skills and attitudes.

It seems from all indications that the universities' model of knowledge are performing their duties in the aspect of theoretical knowledge to the satisfaction of the society. The question that comes up at this juncture is, if the curriculum is adequate by the provision of theoretical knowledge where lies the problem? Why are the employers not satisfied with the performances of the graduates from the universities? It then means that there are other issues that may have been responsible for the graduate inability to live up to expectations. Suffice to say that a liberal education should be based on theoretical and practical knowledge. The theoretical knowledge as offered in the universities seems not to satisfy the demands of the labour market. This can be attributed to the fact that the universities curriculum lack appropriate skills required in the various field of work (industries, companies etc) and laboratories for practical which should enhance the performance of graduates in the labour market.

A look at the table 3a and 3b showed that there are areas of discrepancies between the university curriculum and labour market demands. The overwhelming positive support of the employees / employers responses on the lack of practicality in the university curriculum is worrisome. As observed by Igwe, Uzoka and Rufai (2011), that to succeed in today's workplace, young graduates need more than basic reading and mathematics skills. Hence, the need to acquire both theoretical and practical skills that will make them relevant in the labour market.

An in-depth study and content analysis of the curriculum of the few courses offered in the universities (economics, sciences, business studies, etc.) portray that they are lacking in practicality of knowledge, heavily tilted to the cognitive, lacks effective practice, hand-on activities and so on. Unfortunately, these are the areas that are highly demanded by the labour market, be it industries, ministries, banks, etc. It is worthy of note that the lack of these important areas have affected immensely the employability of young graduates,

leading to the high level of unemployment in the country with the attendant vices - youth restiveness, violence, kidnapping, prostitution, 419, cybercrimes (yahoo-yahoo), drug trafficking, religious intolerance, etc.

Results of the analysis of research question 3 and hypothesis 3 showed that majority of the graduates from the universities seem not to possess most of the competences as listed in table 1, which are needed when entering the labour market. Unfortunately, these competences are highly required for employment. Suffice it to say that in this post-modern world of ICTs and globalization, no one can exist meaningfully while lacking these competences. It is pertinent to observe from the responses that these needed competences vis-à-vis the capacity to learn fast, problem solving ability, capacity for application of knowledge in real life, capacity to adapt to new situations, concern for quality, ability to work independently and also be a team worker, acquisition of practical skills to enable one cope with changes etc. are sine-qua-non for employment. This was reiterated by Okunuga (2013), who observes that the level of competences required in skills and attitudes from the undergraduates in chemistry courses are lower than the ones required in industries.

O'Toole (1979) observed that mass production of graduates most of whom are unable to find jobs they can fit into either as a result of demand and supply factors or lack of appropriate skills has created the twin problem of underemployment and unemployment which educators have to look into.

It is a common belief today that most graduates from the various universities in Nigeria cannot defend their certificates. Thus, employers complain bitterly that some of them can neither make simple correct sentences nor take minutes of meetings; and this is quite disturbing. Many of them cannot work independently without being guided, they are not creative, exhibiting poor attitude to work, not painstaking, and do not have most of the



virtues required to succeed in the world of work. Worst still is the non-availability and inadequacy of infrastructures and facilities required to enhance effective teaching and learning at all levels of education in Nigeria.

#### Conclusion

Based on the analysis and findings, the researchers proposed the following probable solutions to ameliorate this cankerworm.

- The universities should adopt an integrated approach to curriculum development.
- Employers should be consulted when curriculum is being developed.
- Employability to a large extent should form the focus of the curriculum.
- Curriculum reform should focus on enrichment of the various university programs.
- The curriculum of the universities should be flexible to allow for constant review to meet the demands of labour market.
- A better understanding of the professional competences of graduates as a key input in various aspects of curriculum revision should be incorporated into the early stages of the curriculum development.
- Retraining of lecturers in the use of modern day equipment and instruments, bilateral relationship between the universities and labour market, and restructuring of the curriculum to bridge the gaps in skills and attitude acquisition.
- There is need to make provision for progressive introduction of a competence-based learning model as a way of increasing graduate employability so that graduates can better adapt to the constant transformation of work environments and also to raise the levels of worker qualifications and expertise called for by the labour market in the country.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that a chasm exists between the university curriculum and the labour market demands which has led to massive underemployment and unemployment in Nigeria.

This scenario can neither enhance nation building nor encourage economic development of the nation. On the other hand the graduates are not given the opportunity to acquire, utilize and maximize their potentials (theoretical and practical skills), making them less competent and competitive in the world of work.

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# Questionnaire on Creating a Synergy between University Curriculum and Labour Market in Nigeria

Dear participants

Kindly answer the following questions on creating a synergy between university curriculum and labour market

## Section A: Bio Data

1. Sex: Male ( ) Female ( )
2. Status: Student ( ) worker ( ) employer ( )
3. Educational Qualification: Undergraduate ( ) B.A/B.sc, B.Ed ( ) MA, M.Sc & Ph.D ( )
4. Marital Status: Married ( ) Single ( ) Divorced ( )
5. Religion: Christian ( ) Moslem ( ) Traditional ( ) None ( )

## Section B

Key: A = Agree, D = Disagree, U = Undecided

S/n	Items	A	D	U
	University curriculum and labour market demand			
1	The content taught in the courses you take are same with what obtains in the labour market			
2	Your degree is very relevant to the world of work			
3	You don't entertain any fears looking for work because you are well prepared from the university			
4	The courses taught in the various subjects are very apt for employment			
5	The employers just do not want to employ			
	Area of difference between school and labour market			
6	Area of difference is more pronounced in theoretical angle			
7	Practicability of knowledge is the major problem of our			



	university education			
8	University education is heavily tilted towards cognitive knowledge			
9	University education lacks adequate and effective practice			
10	Employers require more of hands-on than theories			
	Competences and skills required by employers, for professional curriculum development			
11	Capacity to learn			
12	Problem solving			
13	Capacity for applying knowledge in practice			
14	Capacity to adapt to new situation			
15	Concern for quality			
16	Information management skills			
17	Ability to work autonomously(independently)			
18	Team work			
19	Practical skills to enable one cope with change			
20	Professional knowledge and skills to raise employability			
	Probable solutions			
21	The universities should adopt an integrated approach to curriculum development			
22	Employers should be consulted when curriculum is being developed			
23	Employability should form the focus of the curriculum development			
24	Curriculum reforms should focus on enrichment of the various university programmes			
25	The curriculum of the universities be flexible to allow for constant review to meet the demands of labour market			