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Strategies of managing higher education for youth labour market in Nigeria

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Accepted 10 September, 2009

The role of higher education in preparing youth for labour market is becoming more challenging in the modern society. The effort of higher education in producing relevant and skillful graduates to meet the needs and demand of modern world labour market is a great task for education management. This paper is a review of related literature; it also employed observation coupled with experience. This paper examines youth labour market and; the status of higher education graduates employment, issues and challenges facing higher education, the role of higher education and the strategies of managing higher education to enhance relevance of courses and to alleviate the problem of unemployment. It was concluded that management of education desires relevant curriculum and designing of employable courses to meet the reality of education in modern world. It was however recommended that; the employers of labour and higher education should collaborate and explore the development of employable courses. It was also recommended that higher education should focus on developing students for high skilled technology and that internship should be part of educational experience so as to enhance employment.

INTRODUCTION

Youth empowerment through education and employment demands greater attention. The unique position of higher education in making relevant education within the reach of average youth cannot be overemphasized. The relevance of higher education in this regard is the extent to which the courses studied by students in higher education could readily and easily fixed into the modern labour market. The most imperative phase to accumulate human capital in form of general knowledge is during school. After finishing formal education, young people should be able to subsequently make successful transition from school to work with the skills and knowledge they acquired (UNESCO, 2005). It is desirable of higher education to produce graduates who have ability to think critically and have personal, social and communication skills to meet the requirement of modern labour market. In Nigeria today, many graduates of higher education seems to be highly unemployed, some under-employed and a few number of them are self - employed.

Observations have shown that many graduates work

outside their area of specialization. It seems many graduates employed into private sectors were not based on specialization. Graduates who were employed into government jobs were not different as far as course relevance is concerned.

This paper examined the status of higher education graduates employment, issues and challenges of labour market for higher education, the roles of higher education in labour market and management strategies to enhance the production of relevant graduates in labour market.

STATUS OF HIGHER EDUCATION GRADUATES EMPLOYMENT

Higher education graduates unemployment is growing at an alarming rate in Nigeria. Idumange (2004) was of the view that the Nigerian economy is undergoing recession and that before 1999; most government owned companies were comatose. He said many companies and parastatals had either wound up or provided erratic services. The banking sector also witnessed a great down turn in provision of services. The result was that many employed graduates were laid off while other com-

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companies that were tottering had to downsize the work force. Under such grim circumstances, some graduates had to accept jobs that were unrelated to their specialization, while many took to self - employment. Nwadiani (2000) and Akangbou (1987) lamented that the growing rate of unemployment is due largely to the fact that the education system is expanding much faster than the economy. The result is that graduates, who do not have marketable skills, cannot be employed in the world of work. This trend has made people to perceive contemporary education as investment in frustration (Idumange, 2004).

Higher education graduates in Nigeria today are greatly under-employed. Many graduates get jobs that could not sustain them they engage in such jobs just to make the two ends meet. That is why they receive wages far below the expected wages for those working in standard establishment. Many engaged in un-dignifying jobs.

Agricultural sector are yet to be developed enough to provide employment for higher education graduates. Agriculture which has been the main stay of Nigeria economy before the discovery and exploitation of crude oil has not received the due attention to provide job for the youth. Idumange (2001) and Ljiomah (2000) opined that agriculture that could have employed graduates is near moribund and that the practice of agriculture in Nigeria is majority at subsistence level. However in rural areas, most workers are employed in the agricultural sector either informally or in self - employment while opportunities in the non- agricultural sector, especially in formal employment are limited (Leibbrandt, 2004).

Job mismatch has been a nagging contemporary phenomenon. A great number of higher education graduates get job outside their disciplines, which could be as a result of incongruous relationship between educational system and economy. According to Idumange (2004) he investigated and came out with the finding that 16.1% of the respondents agreed that their jobs were related to their disciplines while 83.9% indicated that their jobs had no relationship with their courses of study.

A large number of graduates look up to government job which are not forthcoming. However, it seems a lot of them perceived government job could not meet their demand. Private companies and banking industries are absorbing a few of the graduates which appears to be a better option for many of the graduate job seekers because of better wages. Graduate self - employment has not been impressive because very few numbers ventured into self-employment, due to high level of poverty in our society.

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES OF LABOUR MARKET FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Increase in global market competition

The increase in global market competition has given rise

to the need to produce graduates that could meet the need of modern world employment skills. In today's labour market, employers of labour attach much importance to graduate employability which seems to refer to work readiness, that is, possession of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and commercial understanding that will enable new graduates to make productive contributions to organizational objectives soon after commencing employment. Indeed, studies of employer demand for graduates in engineering and science disciplines have found that appropriate work experience and evidence of commercial understanding rank highly as selection criteria because of commercial pressures to seek graduates who will not require long 'learning curves' when they start employment (Mason, 1998, 1999).

Skill mismatch

Success in the graduate labour market is typically defined as graduates securing employment in jobs which make appropriate use of the skills and knowledge developed in the course of their university studies (Manson, Williams and Cranmer, 2006). In matching theory, labour market 'failure' on the part of individual graduates' unemployment and under-utilization of graduate - level skills in employment reflects mismatches between graduates and employers which, may come about for a number of reasons. For instance, Coles and Smith (1998) emphasize that in a random, matching model mismatches between job-seekers and employers may arise because of imperfect information, resulting in time and search costs for prospective partners to obtain information about better matches.

Determinants of skill mismatch

In general, a skill mismatch can occur between the educational, qualification acquired by an individual and what is demanded in the labour market. Boateng (2002) lists the determinants of such mismatch as: the type and quality of curriculum, career and academic advisory services; admission and evaluation policies in the tertiary sector; and the role of Faculty boards and employers association in the delivery of education services.

Variation in youth unemployment

The unemployment rates of youth vary with their qualifications. In OECD countries the unemployment rate decreases with the level of education (O' Higgins, 2001). On the other hand in developing regions like Africa it has been argued that the better educated experience higher unemployment rates, which has been called the "educated youth hypothesis" (Leibbrandt, 2004). The premise is that youth from more privilege backgrounds focus their job search on better paid public sector positions

and are as a consequence willing to “queue” for such jobs and remain unemployed. The poorer educated youth do not have the financial means or support to endure unemployment and therefore, seek work in lower paid, poorer quality jobs in the informal economy.

Information technology and opportunity for employment

Information technology is one skill area that is now essential for young people to gain a foot hold in the labour market in developed and increasingly in developing countries. This has been driven by skill - based technological change and globalization. The creation of high skilled information technology work force has been a great challenge to world economy. This work force will be a key component in a growing economic sector. IPKO Institute of higher learning in Pristina, has focused computer and internet technologies (IT) and which would utilize the latest in distance learning methods. More importantly, it would produce graduates who fill jobs in a job market that is crying out for more computer specialists, web designers, network managers ‘and other IT’ specialists.

Enhancing full employment through Internship

The issue of internship in enhancing employment is receiving more attention in today labour market. An internship opportunity provides students or university graduates with multiple periods of work in which the work is related to the student’s course of studies. According to Adeyemi (2008), the Chief Executive Officer, Skillbase Nigeria, a national survey conducted recently showed that employers and business organizations are more likely to extend job offers to 70% of their interns. He said that in 2006 - 2007, employers offered jobs to 67% of interns that have served with them. The human Resource Manager of Domingo Industries, Olasi (2008) said, there are indications that full time recruits coming out of internships are more successful as employees than those drawn from outside of the internship process.

THE ROLES OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN LABOUR MARKET

Youth transformation for job readiness

Our society today is facing the challenges of gaining education that delivers students the right set of skills and knowledge demanded by the labour market. Higher education has major role to play in empowering youth for labour market. There is the need for higher education to see new reality of education in modern world. The reality recognizes that the primary purpose of higher education is to transform students into critical, lifelong learners. It

also explores the development of employability agenda in higher education, examines the nature and implication of organization change for graduates and assesses what attributes graduates will need in the next decade (McClellan, 2001).

Education for intellectualism

Higher education was conceived and designed to foster intellectualism. In the classical sense, in the higher education environment, students were supposed to learn the body of knowledge available in a particular field, the theoretical framework, developed in that area and continue adding to it through research and writing. In this traditional framework, knowledge existed for the sake of knowledge and the pursuit of knowledge was itself a worthy goal. Education in that sense was designed to produce intellectuals who would work in a very limited number of professions: lawyers, clergymen, doctors, professors and so on.

Practical oriented education

In the modern world, however, the classical approach is no longer defensible for the vast majority of students. Those who lived and worked outside “ivory tower” of academia truly lived in a different world in which they had little or no contact with the intellectual world. Education nowadays has to be much more practically oriented and focused on one primary objective of producing students who are ready to fill available jobs in a competitive economy. This means that higher education must be more closely tied to the businesses and industries that manage the market economy.

Producing quality, relevant and employable graduates

The reality of education today, is that higher education must turn out students who are ready to fill available jobs in the market place, who are ready to work in flexible organizations that will be constantly changing. The students themselves will continue to learn and grow intellectually throughout their professional lives so that they can adapt to fit the needs of their organizations and “grow” with them. Higher education needs to produce graduates who have the personal, social and communication skills needed in the modern world. For example, employers today typically look for people who have good communication skills. They want people who are team players and those who can put forward ideas persuasively. They also need people who have good social skills, who are able to relate to other people well. Most importantly, though employers need people with real skills who possess the practical knowledge required on their job.

Educational system produces graduates who have the

ability to think critically, to challenge assumptions, to ask questions and to find out answers on their own. It must produce students who are not afraid to have ideas, who are not afraid to advocate their ideas and who are willing to listen to and accept the ideas of others. They must know and accept the principle of compromise, that there are seldom absolutes in the real world and that people working in teams and working together on projects must adapt to each other, as well as to the demands of the work place (McClellan, 2001).

MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE RELEVANCE OF COURSES IN LABOUR MARKET

Higher education is facing challenges of producing graduates that are relevant in filling the available vacancies in labour market. It is very expedient for school administrators to look inward, devise series of means and strategies to produce students that could meet the required skills and knowledge of modern labour market.

Collaboration between employers of labour and higher education

The new reality of education in modern world is that, there should be contact and interaction between employers and higher education administrators, in other words industry and education should team up to respond to a need in the market place, in a practical manner. Higher education should therefore make closer links with employers to help them identify and adopt strategies to overcome any skills shortages and to be responsive provider of education in areas of higher - level skill shortage.

Curriculum adaptation to meet labour market requirements

Higher education has to focus curriculum that is aimed at a growing job market, it could be tied closely to the private sector through its partnership and its students will benefit from studying with people who are not only "academics" in the strict sense of the word, but which are also actively working in their field of study and have first hand contact and experience with the market place. These people are best able to decide what skills and knowledge students need for today's job market and can constantly adapt course content and classroom discussion to the real needs of the students.

Making internship a normal part of education experience:

The main job of a school, or a university, or any institute

of higher learning, is to prepare students for a real job in the real world so that they can go out and take their rightful productive place in the society. To do this, the educational system must be in close contact with the business community and be willing and able to determine and respond to the needs of that community. Higher education can make internships and work study a normal part of the education experience. In this way, students are able to apply their newly gained knowledge to the real world and then to continue their education with a more certain knowledge of how they will apply it in the market place. According to Olasi (2008) "Graduates looking to secure good jobs must use the benefit of internship to secure their future and their career, no matter what the starting packages are for a start. It would solve the problem of unemployment.

Administrators and business community to maintain contact through research and projects

Administrators and academics should maintain contact with the business community through research and projects done on contract, through participation in professional associations and by deliberate efforts to ascertain the needs of the private sector on a regular basis.

Focusing programmes that enhance self employment

Higher education should focus and design programmes that enhance self-employment. Attention should be focused on the need to make students self-employed. The importance of vocational courses in this regard cannot be over emphasized. Vocational courses would not make prospective higher education graduates depend only on white collar jobs. Hence vocational courses such as agriculture, food technology, home economics and technical courses among others desire attention. Highly skilled technological courses, such as web designing, computer engineering and science and space technology desire attention in higher education in this age.

Professional orientation for educators

Professional orientation for educators is required, so as to keep them abreast of time in knowledge and technological skills. Educators should make the contents of their course materials up to date, relevant and challenging to students. In this age of information and communication technology (ICT) educators in this part of the world cannot afford to lag behind in the committee of nations. They should be able to compare favourably with their colleagues across the globe, so that they are able to produce graduates who are able to secure jobs anywhere in the world. The world of jobs should be opened to higher

education graduates.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth labour market desires greater attention upon the backdrop of higher rate of youth unemployment. Skill mismatch between job - seekers and employers, inadequate skilled information technology workforce, complied with under- employments have been prevalent in the labour market. The role of higher education in turning out employable graduates who could readily fill available vacancies is pertinent. Higher education therefore should take into cognizance the need to make contact and interaction with employers of labour and design curriculum to meet the reality of modern labour market. Higher education should make internships and work study a normal part of the educational experience. Moreover, research into the need of private sectors and employer of labours and relevance of higher education in labour market deserves attention. It is high time, higher education designed programmes that make agriculture and other vocational courses relevant, highly desired and required in modern labour market.

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