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EMPLOYABILITY OF ADULT EDUCATION POSTGRADUATE STUDENTS IN UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN, NIGERIA: OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

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Abstract

There is a growing interest in employability among postgraduate students in University of Ibadan. The study aimed at the opportunities that are available for postgraduate students of the department of adult education. It found out that postgraduate students lack requisite skills in setting career goal for themselves and consequently suffer from lack of focus despite the efforts of the University.

Keywords: *Employability, Adult Education, postgraduate students, opportunities and threats*

Introduction

Observation shows that sponsorship of postgraduate programme is mostly borne by parents and guardians. This was not the case in the earlier years of University existence. In the 1970s to 1990s in Nigeria most postgraduate students had paid jobs and they use to come back to the university when those jobs required them to have higher degree. In the face of the new development of unemployment among postgraduate students, this study explains how University of Ibadan Postgraduate School has shown concern for the employability of its postgraduate students. What does the postgraduate school do as activities to ensure that its postgraduate

students are employed in the University, other Universities and other sectors of the economy?

This study is not just a report of postgraduate students in Adult Education, University of Ibadan have benefited from what postgraduate has done in the past years but it is also an examination of how it can improve on these efforts for better service delivery and functional human society. A baseline data of two hundred postgraduate students in 2016/2017 session was used to do a Focus Group Discussion of job status and employability of newly admitted students for 2017/2018 session in the Department of Adult Education, while Key Informant Interviews of the principal officers of the Post Graduate School (PGS) of the University provided information on efforts of the postgraduate school in ensuring employability during studies. It also analysed all the other avenues available for employability and how far past students used these channels to become employed during or after their programmes.

Experiences in Employability

Employment had become a serious problem when these researchers finished Masters in Education in 2001 and 2012 respectively. Jobs were not available but their parents and guardians could still afford to send them for higher degree. After the Masters, they continued to look for jobs. Interestingly some of the academic jobs interview that the corresponding author applied for apart from the bias of culture also requested for registration of a PhD programme. So after Masters, they enrolled for a PhD programme without any hope of sponsorship to secure academic job.

This was an experience of seventeen years ago and most postgraduate students in the University of Ibadan are still found in this category. This experience is important for two reasons that not much has changed in terms of provision and that these researchers have a burden duty to research into employability and assist postgraduate students in employment.

A Review of Graduates' Employability

Employability is operationalised as 'the capacity to function successfully in a role and ability to switch between occupations

thus remaining functional throughout life (Arowolo, 2017). This description is important because of the need for application of knowledge which is needed for employability. Our graduates suffer from the inability to use their knowledge in profitable enterprises because they cannot just see the opportunities that are available in the larger society. Many jobs were believed to belong to those who did not go to school or obtain degrees. This is far from the truth as many graduates are presently engaged in fashion designing, makeup art, and catering services. These are jobs that are later found out in this study that self employed graduates do.

In the same study by Arowolo (2017), out of the estimated 3,000 post graduates in the University of Ibadan, the study randomly sampled two hundred students in Faculty of Education which has the largest number of postgraduate students. An estimated 58.5% were unemployed, 10% were self employed, while 12.5% were underemployed, and 24% were employed by government or private sector. It was shocking to find out from this study that graduates responded in the negative to: awareness of employable skills that can make them employable. These are conceptual and creative thinking (90%); self awareness (81%); global and commercial awareness (85%), emotional intelligence (60%), training in after school to work transition (84.5%), technical skills (90%), communication skills (92.5%). Only leadership skill had positive response of 92.5% awareness. What is the rating of leadership skill among employable skill? Whatever it is, it is most unlikely that leadership skill will be the first skill in a new employee would need. Even if it is required, it would be a combination of other skills which the participants responded negatively to.

From the background, that critical thinking has been identified as one of the employable skills required by graduates to get employment Omoregie (2008) said that a high percentage of Nigerian graduates do not know how to confront the problem of unemployment with their creative and critical thinking. Hence, their education has become just an acquisition of certificates and when a certificate cannot give them the expected white collar job, they register for the acquisition of further certificates which may not usually solve the problem of unemployment.

In another study, Omoregie (2016) traced the problem of employability of Nigerian graduates to the misconception about technical and vocation education in Nigeria. So many policies have been introduced to save the educational problems of Nigeria from its bookish curriculum but little has been achieved due to what many identify as poor implementation of the programme. Technical and vocational education which was seen as ment for less brilliant students will become the focus of attention when they get to the University. So, students do not pay much attention to it.

Also, Omoregie (2012) suggested that with expected innovations that are required in the workplace; there is the need for a close relationship which should exist between schools and industries. There is a current gap created by the need of the industries to meet educational provisions in school. This has led to unemployment and low manpower development in most developing countries.

Opportunities in University of Ibadan

There are immense opportunities for graduates of University of Ibadan to get employment in Nigeria and outside the country based on the goodwill of its alumni spread all over the country and all over the world. The University continues to improve its image by putting in place quality assurance mechanisms to ensure that its workers do their work in order to improve on its output. Government Universities are still the universities of first choices in Nigeria while private Universities are for those who can afford it and could not get admission into government universities. Despite industrial actions that prolong year of study in the University, government universities can still not admit up to 10% of its qualified candidates.

Work Study Scheme (WSS)

The University of Ibadan through its work study scheme which was reactivated in 2014 provides financial assistance to students who have financial challenges. The student affairs division of the University had coordinated this since inception. The work – study scheme engaged students at both undergraduates and postgraduate levels in various kind of work for stipend during their studentship.

Out of one hundred and twenty five students engaged in the work study scheme in 2016/ 2017 session, only 25 were post graduate students. During the current session there have been over a hundred applications from postgraduate students but only five have been engaged. According to the desk officer of the programmes the scheme could not accommodate those who want to work as research assistant and librarians because there are no faculty members to accommodate them.

Under the office of the vice chancellor there is a centre for social orientation which has the mandate to promote desirable attitudes and behaviour in students. This unit because of its finding that financial constraints are major determinants of misbehaviour among students have supported the work study scheme. This they have done by an appeal for monthly voluntary contribution into the work study scheme so that it can support more students.

Distance Learning Centre

The Distance Learning Centre (DLC) of the University has provision for academic advisors who are usually doctoral students. They assist in facilitation, examination, supervision and other academic activities at the centre. These students are paid for their activities. Through this arrangement, postgraduate students have regular means of livelihood and hope of being recruited as members of staff into the university. This arrangement suffered some set back when National Universities Commissions in Nigeria insisted on accreditation of the programmes under DLC. Many of the departments lost their places and had to comply with the requirements for accreditation. This meant that departments who do not have participants on the programmes would not need advisors

UI Postgraduate School Efforts

- i. Postgraduate school scholarship award scheme:
 - In a bid to invest in promising students and younger generation of scholars, the Post-graduate school (PGS) instituted an award of monthly stipend of #45000, waiver of tuition and other related fees.

- The recipients are selected based on the potentials of their doctoral theses to contribute to development and extension of existing knowledge in various disciplines
 - The scholarship is awarded every academic session and renewable for two other academic sessions.
- ii.** Postgraduate school teaching and research assistantship scheme:
- This scheme is a monthly stipend of #45000, waiver of tuition and other related fees designed to offer assistance to scholars on the Ph.D. programmes to acquire basic skills in teaching and research with a view to developing their pedagogical skills.
 - The scholarship is awarded every academic session and renewable for two other academic sessions.
- iii.** Postgraduate school scholarship for students living with physical disability:
- The belief in ability and disability makes the PGS to offer support to academically sound postgraduate students living with disability tenable for a maximum of three semesters for Master Degree, and a period of one academic session and renewable for up to two other academic sessions for doctoral students
 - The scheme is designed to promote the welfare of physically challenged students in line with global best practices
 - The award involves a waiver of tuition and all other related fees, monthly stipends of N25,000.00

Discussion with Post graduate students

In a class of fifty four, twenty two were present in a compulsory research methodology class. Out of the twenty two, eight were unemployed while fourteen claimed they were self employed. The self employed and unemployed were separated for further discussion. The discussion with the unemployed showed that two participants demonstrated awareness of setting an employment goal and that

they can strategically follow it during their eighteen months of Master's programme. The discussion of other six participants, only pointed to the fact of their employment being dependent on the future they do not know. They said they will keep searching for jobs until they get. To the question: which kind of job? They said any kind of job will do where they can manage. Among the eight that were unemployed, five were female. Two of the female said they must get a job before getting married, while three said that they can get married without a job but that it largely depends on the kind of job that their fiancés have.

The researchers were worried with the number, thirty two, that was absent for class. The discussion with the coordinator of the course showed that 12 students out of the 32 have attended class at one time or another which meant that they only missed the class but 20 are not likely to be interested in the programmes again because of lack of finance and employment that could not allow them come for the programme again. This means that in the Master's class for 2017/2018, there will be only 34 candidates. The number of Master's students continues to dwindle in the department of Adult Education in past years.

Threats to Employability of Postgraduate Students in UI

There are many reasons why students come for postgraduate programmes. One of it has been stated earlier in this paper, that it is: interest in an academic position. Another reason is further education in ones career. This can be a request from the employer. It could also be from the individual who wish to advance in a career or change it. Some come for Masters Degree or PhD for just social reasons. Other reasons apart from academic put undue pressure on faculty members because the production of high level manpower is at a disadvantage. At times we have students who do not have any business with scholarship. They cannot serve as assistants in either your teaching or research. They just want the title of a PhD holder.

In a dwindling economic condition in Nigeria, employment is not forthcoming. There is no longer graduate assistantship and young faculty members are few. The staff mix is top heavy with few

or no younger lecturers. Government universities in Nigeria no longer employ and when they do, it is strictly on political reasons. So you have Faculty members who should not be in the Faculty by the fact of ineptitude or moral problem. But they are there and protected by the system. The implication is that they are occupying spaces that some others who did not have political influences could have occupied. The University of Ibadan has made efforts to stop this by the introduction of series of interview and presentations that candidates make before they are employed, and it is becoming rather difficult to impose candidates on both faculty members and students because everyone has a say in the employment process.

The University is largely a world of its own without connection with the industry and businesses who use our end products. Olayinka (2015:150) noted that 'questions to address in training in entrepreneurship include whether the environment is conducive for entrepreneurship training in our university, how many students projects/theses make business sense and how many businesses have spun off from research in our university? He promised to develop 'key employment skills by providing students with co curricular activities and opportunities'. The questions we need to ask ourselves are: would this project, dissertation, and thesis make any meaning to any industry, organisation, and establishment in the larger society? Who will buy it in the market place or sponsor it for production. If research is done and remains on our shelves with little or no impact on our immediate society, then we cannot achieve employability.

Apart from in-breeding that is common in our faculties, faculties in University of Ibadan no longer attracts foreign expertise. This has far reaching effects of the horizon of students and their employability in other countries. There is no substitute to having a scholar from another country in departments and faculties. Collaboration and attendance at international conference should serve as a support for that and not a replacement for employing expatriates.

Conclusion

Efforts of the University administration are commendable but the dwindling resources to the University system especially with the new financial system leaves much more to be desired. Apart from the University efforts, post graduate students in the department of Adult Education should take their employment in their hands first by discovering who they are in terms of their interests and capacity. This will allow for a realistic judgement on what they can do to get employed. Then each of the student can make deliberate effort at being trained in their area of interest for either self employment or paid employment.

Recommendations

There is need for more volunteerism among postgraduate students in the department of Adult Education. In a consumerist society like ours, 'our students ask what is in it for us now'. Rewards in academics do not come immediately. It involves painstaking effort at improving oneself and offering service to others in need. If anyone wants a job in academics he/she should prove it by doing it. It is a place meant for a few people because not many people can go through its rigours. Before long a determined and sustained efforts will be noted and rewarded.

Faculties and departments should work with industries, private sectors and government agencies so that they can become more involved in sponsorship of researches that would solve societal problems. There is need for more researches into the problems of the society whereby interventions will be provided by researchers and the outside world would not have any choice than to invite these individuals to assist in solving societal problems. The relevance of our researches has been called to question.

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