

Employers' Assessment of the Employability of Nigerian Graduates in Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study surveyed employers' assessment of the employability of Nigerian graduates. The population for the study comprised every private and public employer of labour in Nigeria. To carry out the assessment, purposive sampling technique was used to sample 516 private and public senior administrative personnel that have administered work on Nigerian graduates within Ilorin metropolis. A questionnaire titled Employability of Nigerian Graduates (ENG) was used to gather the needed data. Collected data were analyzed using percentages and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Finding revealed that 60.8% of sampled employers believed the graduates were employable while 39.14% thought otherwise. However, their beliefs varied across fields of work. While a high percentage of respondents in Education Sector were of the opinion that Nigerian graduates were employable, a high percentage of those in business sector classified them as unemployable. In addition, majority of the employers having the latter opinion blamed the unemployable status of the graduates on inadequate exposure to job-training schemes, short duration of training and inadequate classroom-based academic training. It was, therefore, concluded that Nigerian graduates were employable but can be more employable if Nigerian higher institutions intensify in exposing undergraduates to job training schemes such as practical trainings and entrepreneurial education while also broadening the scope of what they are taught in the classroom.

Key words: Employer, assessment, perception, employability, field of work, graduates, academic orientation.

- *The word graduates, as used in this study, means graduates of Nigerian universities and polytechnics that had completed their National Youths Service Corps (NYSC), program.*

Introduction

One of the main reasons for series of reforms in Nigerian higher education, since the time of Ashby Commission of 1959, is the need to upgrade Nigerian indigenous employees and to prepare the Nigerian youth for the world of work. As expressed in the *National policy on Education* (NPE, 1998). Nigeria provides tertiary education so that her youths can acquire physical and intellectual skills that will enable them become self-reliant, employable and useful members of the society.

As at December 2008, there were ninety-two (92) registered universities (federal = 27; state = 31 and private = 34); seventy-three (73) polytechnics and other degree awarding college of education in Nigerian (*The Nigerian Education Times*, 2008). These institutions offered courses leading to acquisition of knowledge and skills supposedly needed in the world of work. Apart from this, the universities exposed her undergraduates to job-training programs. Those in science oriented faculties in universities and schools in polytechnic are exposed to months of student industrial work experience (SIWES) and Industrial Training (IT) programs respectively; while those in Faculty of Education are exposed to training practice; students do Housemanship, and law student attend law schools. The main objective of these works—exposures is to give the undergraduates prior training on what their professions and world of work might demand of them, after graduation.

Apart from the varied job training a graduate must have gathered while in school, his degree is expected to admit him into the world of work and give him the opportunity to contribute to the development of his society. This is because the degree is a certification of his skill and academic worth. With the certificate, it is assumed that the graduate has passed through a standard process of training that is dependable and rewarding. However, the validity of these assumptions has been debated and doubted by employment stakeholders.

One of such doubt was expressed at an academic forum, in 2007, when the National Association of Pro-Chancellors of Nigerian Universities (NAPCNU) through the communiqué of their third Biennial Seminar, declared that many Nigerian undergraduates were not employed because they were unemployable (*The punch*, 7th December; 2007). Also, more recently, at a political forum, the Nigerian Minister of Education, Dr. Sam Egwu, was referenced to have said that 80% of Nigerian graduates were unemployable (*Nigerian Compass*, 5th March, 2009). These academic and political declarations on the employability of products of Nigerian higher education can negatively affect the economic worth and career development of the graduates, nationally and internationally.

Such declarations cannot help a country of growing economy and a nation of about 45% youthful populations (Population Reference Bureau, 2007). Nigerian graduates are not expected to be unemployable after series of curricular overhauling embarked upon in the system of Nigerian higher education. For example, in April 2001, the National Universities Commission (NUC) organized a stakeholder Conference on Curriculum Review and in June 2004, the commission conducted what it called “*need assessment survey*” to determine what knowledge and skills were expected of Nigerian graduates in the world of work. Finding from the survey brought about refocusing Nigerian university education on acquisition of entrepreneurial skills. Today, many aspects of the reviewed curriculum are applied in the training of Nigerians in higher institutions of learning (Okebukola, in *The Tell*, July, 2006).

On the other hand, another school of thought believes that declaring Nigerian undergraduates as unemployable in the political arena needs to be substantiated empirically (*Nigerian Compass*, 5th March 2009; *The Punch*, 4th March, 2009). According to Luthans, (2005) and Schien (1965), to determine the employability of any set of employees, there should be a standard job–assessment process that is best carried out by persons who have engaged a sub-set of the employees to be assessed in a given job for a period of time. Such assessors must be knowledgeable about the required quality of the job on which the employees are to be based. Luthans (2005) argues that candidate’s employability cannot be determined through mere credential assessment but rather through assessment of job exposure that is conducted by employers. One can infer from these that the best set of people that can declare Nigerian graduates as unemployable or employable are those that have administered job on them and observed their work output for a period of time.

It on this premise of not determining the employability status of Nigerian graduates using employer–based assessment process that the prior declarations of Nigerian graduates as unemployable are weakened. The weakness, therefore, creates a research gap that justifies the essence of this study.

Research Questions

The following research questions were generated to guide the study:

1. What is the employers’ perception of the employability of Nigerian graduates?
2. What do employers perceive as determinant factors in the possible declaration of Nigerian graduates as unemployable?
3. Is there any difference in employer’ perception of employability of Nigerian graduates on the basis of field of work?

Research hypotheses

One null hypothesis was generated on the third research question to guide the study: There is no significant difference in employers' perception of employability of Nigerian graduates on the basis of field of work.

Methodology

The study was a survey of the employability of Nigerian graduates. It employed purposive sampling technique in sampling 516 respondents from the population of top administrative personnel of government ministries, educational sector, and private organizations who at one level or the other had served as Heads of Department/ Units or as administrative officer under which Nigerian graduates that were mobilized for NYSC programme worked. Top administrative personnel were purposively sampled so as to have the Employability Assessment carried out by persons that have had opportunity to observe the graduates' work-habit, skills and knowledge at work. An instrument titled Employability of Nigerian Graduates (ENG) was designed to elicit the needed data. The instrument has three sections. Section 'A' elicited respondents' work history-mainly to determine their work experience with Nigerian graduates. The Section 'B' elicited respondents' perceptions on the graduates' employability. The section has twenty items with options ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). An item in this section asked pointedly whether Nigerian graduates were employable or not. Responses to this item were analyzed to answer research question 1. The Section 'C' has eight items each presenting possible reasons why an employer might declare a Nigerian graduate unemployable. Respondents were asked to pick among the possible reasons why they will or will not employ a Nigerian graduate; responses to the 8 items were analyzed to answer research question 2. Collected data from Section B was analyzed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) in testing the only raised hypothesis.

Table 1: Distribution of sample across professions

	Education sector	Business sector	Ministries	Total
Male	84	86	86	256
Female	88	78	94	260
Total	172	164	180	516

As shown on Table 1, 172 administrative personnel, across different levels of education, that have at one point or the other administered work on NYSC corps members were sampled for the study. Also, 164 business organizations' administrative personnel from companies and banks were sampled and 180 from government ministries were also sampled.

Data were analyzed using frequency count, percentages and Analysis of Variance (ANOVA).

Analysis of Data

Research question 1

What is the employers' perception of the employability of Nigerian graduates?

Table 2: percentage of employers perceiving Nigerian graduates as either employable or unemployable.

Employers	Employable		Unemployable	
	n	%	n	%
Education Sector	136	26	36	7
Business Sector	66	13	98	19
Ministries	112	22	68	13
Total percentage	314	60.8%	202	39.14%

Data on Table 2 show that 60.8% of sampled respondents believed that Nigerian Data on Table 2 show that 60.8% of sampled respondents believed that Nigerian undergraduates were employable while only 39.14% of the sampled respondents believed they were unemployable. However, the highest percentage of employers that believed they were employable was in the Education Sector. On the other hand, the highest percentage of employers that believed they were unemployable was in the Business Sector.

Research Question 2:

What do employers perceived as determinant factors in the possible declaration of Nigerian graduates as unemployable?

To answer this research question, respondents were presented with eight (8) items of possible reasons why some might want to declare Nigerian graduates unemployable. Respondents were asked to pick only one reason among the provided ones that would have been their reason if they were to declare the graduates unemployable. Only the two hundred and two (202) respondents that declared the graduates unemployable (see Table 2) responded to this aspect of the questionnaire.

Table 3: Determinant of Nigerian graduates' employability as perceived by employers possible reasons for employability of Nigerian graduates

		Education Sector		Business Sector		Ministries		Total
		n	%	n	%	n	%	
1.	Short duration of training	21	10	--	--	20	10	20%
2.	Inadequate exposure to job training schemes	--	--	66	29	--	--	29%
3.	Poor academic training	6	2.9	--	--	41	20.3	23.2%
4.	Low age at graduation	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
5.	Poor attitude to work	9	4.5	12	6	7	3.5	14%
6.	Inadequate experts as lecturers	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
7.	Inadequate teaching equipment	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
8.	Irrelevance of acquired skills to the job sought	--	--	20	10	--	--	--

As shown on Table 3, 20% of the respondents were of the opinion that Nigerian graduates were unemployable because the duration used in training the graduates was too short. However, this opinion was only characteristics of employers of Nigerian graduates in Education Sector and those in the Ministries. Twenty-three point two percent (23.2%) of the respondents believed that the problem of unemployable status of Nigerian graduates is as a result of low quality of academic training the graduates were exposed to, while in schools. On the other hand, 29% of the respondents, particularly those in Business Sector attributed the problem to inadequate exposure of the graduates to job training programs. Fourteen percent (14%) of the respondents blamed the problem on poor attitude to work that some graduates may have displayed while been assigned to duties. The highest percentage of the employers with this opinion is however in the Education Sector. On the other hand, 20% of respondents mainly in Business Sector and Ministries believed Nigerian graduates were unemployable because the skill they acquired while in school is not relevant in the world of work they often seek for after graduation.

Hypothesis testing

There is no significant difference in employers' perception of employability of Nigerian graduates on the basis of field of work.

Table 4: ANOVA description of employers' perceptions of the employability of Nigerian graduates perceptions

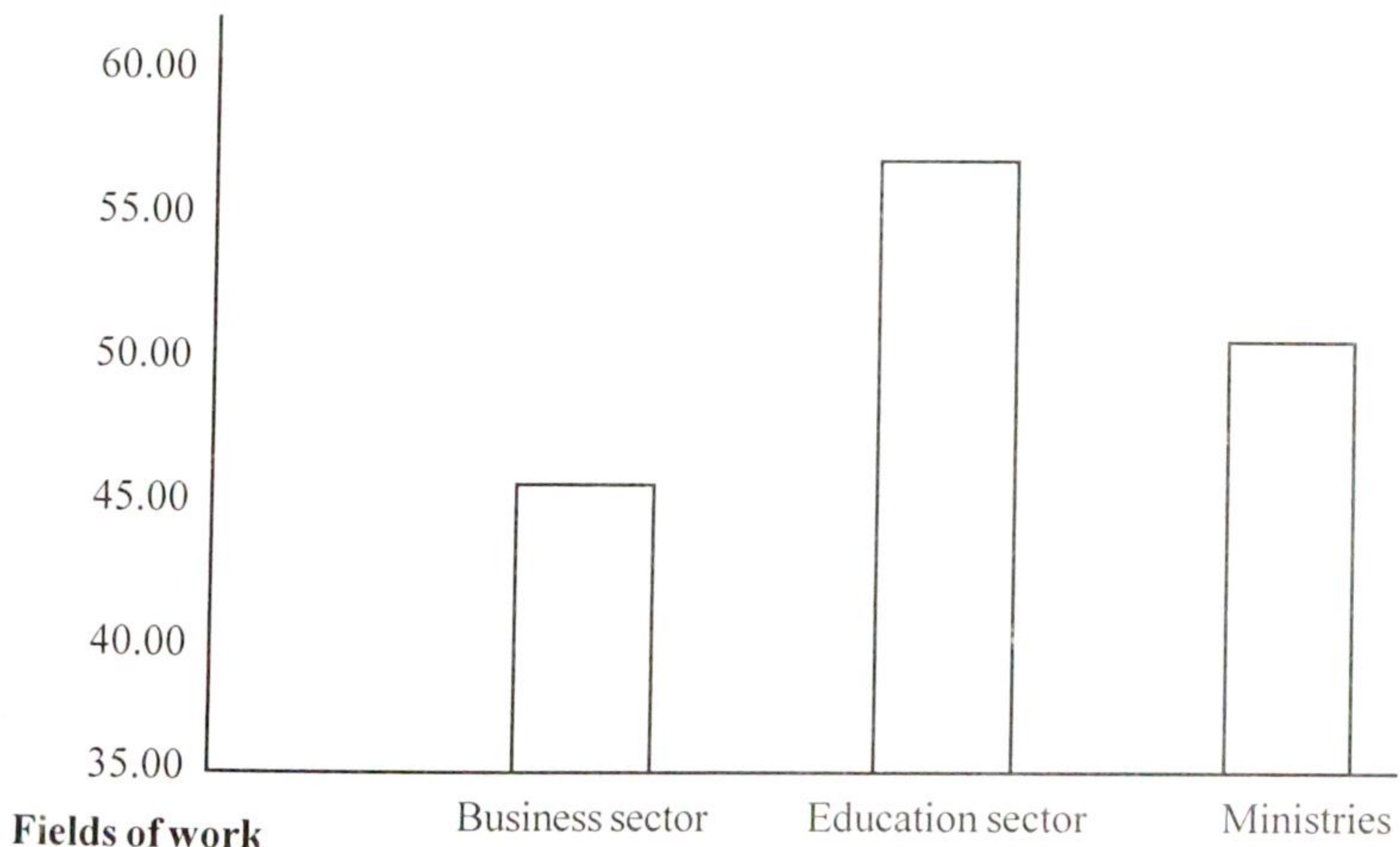
	Sum of square	df	Mean Square	f.cal	sig
Between Group	51306.38	2	25653.19	236.89*	.000
Within group	55552.57		513	108.29	
Total	106859		515		

*significant $p < 0.05$

On table 4, f. cal (236.89) is significant at .000. This makes Hypothesis 1 rejected. Thus it was concluded that there was a significant difference in the employers' perception of the employability of Nigerian graduates.

The figure 1 below illustrates the significant of the difference further. As shown on the diagram, employers in the educational sector have the highest mean score of positive perception of the employability of Nigerian graduates, followed by those in the ministerial sector. The least of such positive perception lay among those in the business sector.

Figure 1: means plot of employers' perceptions of the Employability of Nigerian graduates



Discussion

The motive of any nation's investment in education is to have a turn-out of crop of skilled individuals that can meet its manpower needs. Nigerian investment in higher education is no doubt aimed at producing needed trained work force that can contribute towards achieving several socioeconomic goals of the country. This accounts for why many human and non-human resources have been put into Nigerian degree awarding institutions just as much is expected from the institutions.

Yet, while it has been expressed by several categories of academics, political and economic technocrats that Nigerian graduates are unemployable (*The Punch*, 7th Dec; 2007; *Nigerian Compass*, 5th March, 2009) findings in this study empirically confirmed that substantial percentage of employers of Nigerian graduates believed that the graduates were employable. This opinion was expressed by sixty-eight percentage (60.8%) of the sampled employers from Education, Business and Ministries Sectors. This percentage is substantially higher than the 39.14% of the sampled employers that thought the graduates were unemployable. The percentage of the respondents that had the former opinion was substantial because it was higher than the average of the percentage of respondents sampled for the study. One thing that makes this finding valid and dependable is the fact that it is the summation of the opinion of respondents drawn from employers that had had the opportunity to administer job on and observe the graduates at work.

Though, some among the sampled employers still declared them unemployable but they were minimal in number (39.14%) compared to those that believed they were employable (60.8%). The reason given by those having the former opinion can not be completely minored. Apart from the reason of political discrimination that Agbonna, Yusuf & Yusuf (2009) found in a separate research on why Nigerian graduates feared being employed, the finding in this study showed that employers in Business Sector (BS) believed the graduates can be declared unemployable because they lacked adequate exposure to job training schemes. Also, those in Education Sector (ES) and in the Ministerial Sector (MS) identified the problem of their unemployable status to be that of short duration of training. These two reasons are related, one may be declared inadequately trained or to have been exposed to inadequate job training, as employers in BS claimed, because he was not giving enough time to learn, as those in ES and MS claimed. Interestingly, none of the employers having the unemployable opinion attributed the problem to inadequate teaching equipment in the higher institutions or believed that Nigerian graduates graduate at immature age as had been expressed in the past (Adesina, 2005).

Thus, if the problem is inadequate job training or duration of time for training, the effectiveness of job training schemes like SIWES, IT and TP are questionable. On the other hand, the fact that 10% of employers that classified the graduates as unemployable anchored the problem on irrelevant acquired skill also put the system of posting adopted by the NYSC to question. A graduate that may have been adequately trained to be relevant in the Banking sector but posted by the NYSC to serve as a teacher in a school

may not be seen by his/her employers as employable since he/she had acquired an irrelevant skill in teaching profession. This might be what contributes to why certain percentage of sampled employers across the sectors, covered in this study, blamed unemployable status of the graduates on poor attitude to work i.e. having negative work habit. Past researches have established the fact that when one works in a system in which one lacks the basic skill, one can not be productive or efficient (Schein, 1965, Luthans, 2005).

Conclusion

Yet, with 60.18% respondents ($60.18\% > 50\%$, more than the average of sampled respondents) one can conclude that Nigerian graduates are employable. But considering the other school of thought, Nigerian graduates are likely to be more employable if they are employed in fields for which they are trained. This aspect of the findings points to the need to have standing policies that will make Nigerian graduates get employed or posted for NYSC program into their fields of training.

The significant difference found in the perception of the sampled respondents based on fields of work (Business, Education and Ministerial Sections) signifies that employers' assessments of the employability of the graduates in question depend on the field of work within which the graduates are assessed.

Recommendations

With these findings, it was recommended that:

1. Nigerians, particularly those in the realm of making policies, should always base their assessment of the employability of the Nigerian graduates on empirical findings rather than on mere speculations.
2. There is need to ensure that the graduates are exposed to adequate job-training programs while in school. Programs like the SIWES, Industrial Training, Teaching Practice Scheme, Houseman-ship and the NYSC mobilization schemes are to be made rich enough to cater for job-preparation needs of the Nigerian graduates.

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