Skill Mismatch and Employability in Nigeria: A review of Literature
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Abstract
The alarming incidence of skill mismatch and the consequential declining employability has become a key challenge to governments, educational institutions and employers of labour at large. This paper reviews relevant literature as regards the nature, scope, causes and consequences of the worrisome trend, identifies some gaps and suggests a tripartite investigation involving students, lecturers and employers. It also suggests that the investigation focuses on social and management sciences which accounts for 50% of students population in Nigerian universities and also the need explore the presence or otherwise of gender dimension to the mismatch crises

Key terms: skills, mismatch, employability.

1:Introduction.
Generally, the essence of education is to prepare people for the challenges of life, empower them to appreciate their environment, and take informed decisions for personal and societal benefits. It facilitates cultural transmission, adaptability, institutional building, reduces uncertainty and ensures better material conditions (Utomi, 2015). The core mission is to educate, train, undertake research and in particular, contribute to the sustainable development and improvement of society (UNESCO, 1998). It is also essential for the attainment of the necessary level of economic and social development, social mobility, increased living standards and harmony (Asia & Pacific Regional Conference [APRC], 1997). The Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) outlines the objectives of education as the acquisition of appropriate skills, multidimensional abilities and competencies for self reliance and societal development.

For tertiary education in particular, it includes development of proper values and intellectual capability. Phillips Consulting (2014) sees the purpose of tertiary education as preparation for the job market and sustainable employment by enhancing technical and supportive skills for the field of work. APRC(1997) on the other hand, sees the essence of higher education as producing responsible citizens and expertise for the world of work. Fasuyi (2015) however takes a different perspective; he believes that education serves as a means to an end by providing its recipients with a window to see opportunities. Whatever the policy of the government, those who establish universities as well as their direct 'customers' (parents, students), employers and society at large want positive outcomes(Falola, 2015). However, the relevance of higher education should be assessed in terms of the fit between what society expects of institutions and what they do (UNESCO, 1998) and its ability to fulfill its societal objectives of full employment level, increased productivity and income, and economic growth,(Longe, 1999).

Unfortunately, there are persistent and strident complaints that the products of Nigerian universities are unemployable and indeed, half-baked (Kayode, 2009; Adeyemo, Ogunleye, Oke & Adenle, 2010); full of too much theory and little practical content (Pitan & Adedeji, 2012); of dubious quality, even though we are having more education(Programe on the Global Demography of Aging, 2010)and deficient in knowledge, skills and attitude (Okebukola, 2015) to the extent that even the National Universities Commission, doubts the ability of our graduates to meet employers requirements (NUC, 2004 cited in Adedepe, 2010).

The objective of this paper is to review relevant literature on the issue matter of skills mismatch, identify the gaps and set the stage for further research into the subject matter. It is divided into five parts. This introduction (Part 1) is followed by the nature, scope and causes of skill-mismatch( part Two). Part 3 focuses on the consequences, part 4 concentrates of gaps and recommendations while part 5 is the conclusion

2) Nature scope and causes of Skills Mismatch

Skills mismatch refers to gaps between the skills possessed by graduates and those required by employers (Proctor and Dutta, 1995) while employability is the possession of knowledge, aptitudes, skills and other attributes required by employers( British Council, 2014). Thus, higher skills gap leads to lower employability. The reality of this skill-mismatch is both global and disturbing. The appropriate skills for employment as required by employers have been discussed by several authorities. Kayode, (2009) groups them into five; Ogwo (2010) groups them into six, Business Foundation for Education (2010), identifies twenty of them; Dubey, Khatic and Thakur identify twelve, South African Graduates Recruiters Association (SAGRA) (2013) lists seventeen .Indian Skills Report(2016) highlights 4 of them, while PSSP(2014) identify twenty four of them, grouped into 3. These skills and traits revolve around professional, organizational and interpersonal capabilities and include basic, professional & technical, emotional intelligence, critical thinking, self-management, leadership, collaborative, motivation, global and commercial, amongst others. (See figure 1)

![Figure One: skills required for the world of work](image)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Skills and Traits Listed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Dabalen et al, 2000</td>
<td>Communication in the mother tongue &amp; foreign languages; Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; Digital competence; Learning to learn; Social and civic</td>
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<td>No.</td>
<td>Author, Year</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Handel, 2005</td>
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<td>Houston, 2007</td>
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<td>Detoun, 2010</td>
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<td>Farooq, 2011</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Allen, 2011</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Skills You Need, 2013</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>SAGRA, 2013</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Phillips Consulting, 2014</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>Indian Skills Report, 2016</td>
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</table>

Author, 2016

Ogwo, (2010) found that employers deem the employees deficient in conceptual and creative thinking(48%), self-awareness(44%), time management(40%), global and commercial awareness(36%) and emotional intelligence(34%). Another study finds that less than 25% of all employers indicated that they were “Very satisfied” with any skill while dissatisfaction levels appeared to be highest in planning and organisational skills (30%), critical and analytical thinking (28%) and business awareness and entrepreneurial skills (25%).(Phillip Consulting, 2014). According to Sodipo (2010), employers believe that the employees do not possess necessary skills for their jobs (33.3%), coupled with poor level of competency (50%), lack of resourcefulness and poor knowledge of English(40%). It is also instructive that while employers consider skills more important than qualifications (Pakistan Strategy Support Programme (PSSP), 2014) and believe that soft skills are more relevant than professional skills(Bloom & Saeki, 2011), applicants believe that qualifications are more important than skills(Phillips Consulting, 2014).

Unfortunately, this trend did not start today and, it is rather, worsening( Deblan, Oni & Adekola, 2000). This has been linked to the challenging mismatch between university outputs and industry requirements (Akinyemi, Ofem & Ikuenomore, 2012) and inculcating knowledge without deployable skills (Fajana, 2015). For instance, while students consider qualification more important than skills, employers consider skills more important than qualifications (Phillips Consulting, 2014;Mizra, Jeffri & Hashmi, 2014). This trend is not limited to Nigeria as it is the same in Sirilanka (Herath & Ranasinghe, 2011), India (Bloom & Saeki, 2011), where up to 50% of graduates are deemed not skilled (Mishara, 2014), Pakistan( Farooq, 2011), all over Africa (British Council, 2014), the USA ( Handel, 2005) and indeed, all over the globe(Mckinsey, 2013; ILO, 2013). However, Bulgaria appears to be an exception (Business Foundation for Education, 2010). The report that the 2009 best graduating student in University of Ilorin, Okpoto, R.I, remained jobless as at September, 2015(george, 2015), exposed the severity of this predicament.

3) Consequences of Skills Mismatch

This mismatch has led to burgeoning graduate unemployment and the following developments: difficulty in filling available jobs; an alarming tendency to ‘import’ expertise, even at entry levels, since those who schooled abroad are preferred while graduates of Nigerian universities are frustrated, among others. Furthermore, the nexus between education and careers is breaking down irretrievably (Bersin, 2012; World Economic Forum, 2014) as the former no longer guarantees the later and this is not necessarily because there are no jobs; it is because of the skill crises. It appears that rather than producing graduates who are thinking and doing new things(Fisher, 2002) universities are creating a generation of pen-pushers, without the skills and expertise necessary for meaningful contribution to the world of work(Ogunyemi, 1998),concentrating mainly on passing exams and not on practical skills (Okebukola, 2015), and using outdated curriculum (Bamiro, 2010). It may well be that universities have concentrated on knowledge, without any regard to attitude, skills and other attributes which make up the KASO framework. Farooq (2011) concludes that either educational institutions are producing graduates irrelevant to market demand, or they develop inadequate skills among students compared to market requirements.
This unfortunate trend of skill-less qualifications adversely affects the youth, who constitute the future of every society, and an overwhelming majority of the Nigerian population. Nigeria has the highest population in Africa and among the highest in the world. Youths are disappointed and frustrated because they have not realized their objectives for seeking education which are proper perspective of the world, complete personality, building careers, and economic significance (Bersin, 2012). They are also not availed of the advantages of skills which include employability, social mobility, personal development and active citizenship (European Commission, 2009). The frustration resulting from inability to obtain decent jobs and the concomitant respect leads to economic distress, anger and violence. The youth also lose hope in the future as only 50% believe that higher education provides employment opportunities (Mckinsey, 2013). Furthermore, this trend worsens the specter of youth unemployment and general poverty, which stands around 70% in Nigeria, depending on who is measuring and the benchmark used. But while this is going on, competition for the very best candidates is still very high in the job market (SAGRA, 2013)

The youths worldwide, are three times more likely than their parents to be out of job while in Greece, South Africa and Spain more than 50% of the youth are unemployed (McKinsey, 2013). The population of youths in Nigeria (ages 15-35) is 64m and 54% of them are unemployed (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012). As at the first quarter of 2015, the tally is 44.3% unemployed/underemployed between the ages of 15-24, and 25.9% between 25-34 (NBS, 2015) while as at Q2, 2016, the tally is 49.5% (NBS, 2016). The PGDA (2010) estimates that 30% of graduates are unemployed and that those lucky to find jobs are underemployed. The ILO (2015) reports that out of the 201m unemployed in 2014, 74m of them are youths, that heightened youth unemployment despite higher educational attainment is a global affair, and that this fuels social discontent. It has earlier identified lack of relevant skills as the key factor in this worrisome trend (ILO, 2012). Furthermore youth in the NEET band (Neither Employment nor in Education or Training) continues to rise (ILO, 2014).

This scenario is harmful to the socio-economic agenda of the government and makes the quest for mutual respect, social mobility and harmony very difficult to attain (APRC, 1997). Insufficient supply of quality skills is antithetical to economic growth as it adversely affects overall GDP growth, productivity and the employability of fresh graduates (Kemal, 2005). The skill and employability crises and the resulting youth unemployment also constitute cogs on the path the SDGs (Sustainable development goals) as it adversely affects six out of the first ten: poverty(#1) hunger(#2), good health and wellbeing(#3), quality, inclusive education(#4), decent work(#8) and reduced inequality(#10) (UN, 2015). The profitability and competitiveness of firms are adversely affected due to higher recruitment costs, costly remedial training programmes and poor quality of employees. The low employability and poor productivity of those at work also reflects a low social return on investment (Deblan, Oni & Adekola, 2000), and makes it difficult for education to fulfill its societal objectives. This trend has the potential of denying Nigeria the anticipated demography dividends as the country is and will continue to be one of the few countries with young workers across the globe, which ought to be a source of competitive superiority (PGDA, 2010).

The skill crises will likely worsen because of the rapid changes in the world of work- technology, service orientation, workplace democracy, multitasking, internationalization and globalization, and organizational dynamics (European Commission, 2009). Thus, there is serious need for skill upgrade while we are not yet able to satisfy current needs!

It is imperative to note that the skills-debate is not a one-sided argument. There is a school of thought which holds that it contains several incongruities. For instance, some of the issues being raised pertain to personality and attitudinal issues (interpersonal and teamwork, sense of responsibility). It has also not been clarified whether the problem is absolute reduction in skills available, accelerating demand for skills or slowing supply of skills. These may also be due to the age range of those entering the world of work and that means it is a state they will outgrow (Handel, 2005). But these reservations notwithstanding, the skill crises is real and requires all attention, especially in our own environment.

4) Gaps and recommendation for further research

Studies on skill gap, mismatch and employability crises abound across the globe but the focus and scope vary widely. PSSP (2014) covers a wide range of students, focusing on a specific industrial cluster in India; Bloom and Seike (2011); engineering students in India; Mckinsey (2013); global focus, and Rufai et al (2013); vocational and technical education in Nigeria. Herrath & Ranasinghe studied business students only; Sodipo (2010) studied the civil service while Ogwo (2010) dwelt on general and physical sciences. Adeyemo et al (2010) studied science students. Okebukola et al (2004) focused on the whole disciplines in our university system.

Figure 2: Scope & Focus of some previous studies

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Scope/Focus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>PSSP, 2014</td>
<td>Students from diverse disciplines, some industrial clusters in India</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Bloom &amp; Saeki, 2011</td>
<td>Engineering students, India</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Mckinsey (2013)</td>
<td>Global</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Rufai et al, 2013</td>
<td>Vocational and technical education, Nigeria</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Herrath &amp; Ranasinghe, 2011</td>
<td>Business students only</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Sodipo 2010</td>
<td>Civil service, Nigeria</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Ogwo 2010</td>
<td>Physical and general sciences, Nigeria</td>
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5: Conclusion

Skill mismatch has become a scourge to educators, employers and the society. It has led to worsening employability which poses micro and macro challenges to graduates, youth and the society. A lot of studies has been conducted in this regard but more still needs to be done. It is believed that a tripartite approach that focuses on Social and Management Sciences will expand the scope of knowledge in this area and proffer practical solutions to this social challenge.

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