

Academic Excellence as Yardstick for Employability in Nigeria: A Review of the Experiences of Business Education Graduates in Public Tertiary Institutions in Enugu State

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Abstract

The main purpose of the study was to ascertain if academic excellence is a yardstick for employability in the Nigerian labour market. The study was guided by two research questions and two null hypotheses. The population consisted of 173 Business Education graduates from public tertiary institution offering Business Education programme in Enugu State in the 2019/2020 academic session. No sampling was carried out since the population was manageable. The instrument used for data collection was a 17-itemed questionnaire developed by the researcher. The instrument was validated by three experts and the reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha which yielded reliability index of 0.88. The instrument was administered by the researcher. 160 out of 173 copies of the questionnaire were well responded to, returned and therefore, used for data analysis and correlation statistics was used to test the null hypotheses. Findings showed that: High and low achievers get jobs at same rate, Doing well on the job does not depend on grade, High achievers are more creative on jobs, Employers seek skills more than grade, Good grade does not guarantee employability, Job creation is targeted at both high and low achievers are some of the factors to prove that academic excellence is not a yardstick for employability in Nigeria. The null hypotheses showed that no significant relationship exist in the mean responses of high and low achieving Business Education graduates in public tertiary institutions in Enugu State on the itemized variables. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that Attention should be shifted from academic excellence as yardstick for employability in Nigeria so that students are not pressured into dubious means just to graduate with high grades since findings of the study has shown that the both variables has no direct relationship. Employment opportunities should be massively created for all enough for both high and low academic performers since the findings of the study revealed that those with low academic performance can also have valuable skills capable of keeping them on the job for as long as they intend to.

Keywords: Academic Excellence, Employability, Business Education, High and Low Academic Achievers, Public Tertiary Institutions.

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INTRODUCTION

For one to achieve excellence in anything, education is the fundamental requirement. Whether formal or informal, education is one's ability to show positive change through knowledge impartation from someone more knowledgeable than oneself. Education is believed to be of fundamental importance to the development of people and nation with potentials. No wonder Azeeni, (2014) in Bola (2015) opined that

Individuals and nations who took pains to educate themselves are clearly the powerful nations and powerful people in the world. According to Bola (2015), Education in either informal or formal stage has to do with imparting knowledge, skills, moral and cultural values to keep man informed and associable to meet the challenges in the society. It involves teaching, training, and learning between parents, teachers/instructors and the learners/trainees. Students

struggle for admission year in year out just to acquire the prerequisite education to be able to secure befitting jobs or be self-employed after school. It is believed that the level of excellence achieved by a student in school directly impacts on the student's chances of securing a befitting job offer.

In achieving this, the quality of educational materials consumed by these students comes to play. General approaches to quality education are essential if national and regional developments must undergo major changes (Asuquo and Agboola 2014). It is a common notion that one can only vomit what one has been fed with. In the same vein, students can only show excellence if they were excellently taught and guided. In developing countries, for instance, quality education for all has fully become a reality changes in the social and economic structures of society. Moreso, the reality of excellence for enhanced chances of befitting job opportunities over the years has been put to a litmus test as the reality facing many graduates in Nigeria has put a lot of questions in the minds of those at undergraduates' level and those vying for admissions. While those in the schools see for themselves on daily basis the number of graduates walking about the street in search of jobs with no much hope of getting one in the end, they wonder if the situation will eventually face them after graduation or will there be a paradigm shift before their graduation. Students now target academic excellence as a tool to subdue the menace as they graduate.

Excellence in this sense is a steady and targeted performance to exceed expectation. In words of Bola (2015), excellence is achieving steady levels of comparable performances that exceed expectation and are higher than competitors could achieve. It is a common notion among students that achieving excellence in academics will translate to higher chances of gainful employment on graduation. Academic success is not achieved alone but with the best help gotten along the way from parents, teachers/instructors, guidance counsellors and mentors who sheared their talents as endowed by God (Bola 2015). For students to achieve the desired academic excellence, every segment of collaborated efforts by stakeholders in teaching/training/educating a child must count. This also includes the materials and educational curriculum in use. In Nwafor and Nwogu (2015), Ukeje's (2000) comparative analysis of Nigerian education vis-à-vis three other Anglophone West African countries – Liberia, Ghana, and Gambia – in terms of social esteem, academic excellence, and professional rating shows that Nigeria scored very low. This in real sense is majorly associated with facilities provided for teaching and learning activities but not necessary the manpower.

Academic excellence is the ability to perform with self-confidence, make good effort and achieve top grade in academic activities. Achieving excellent academic performance begins with the parents who are

the first contact persons to a child. At school level, what is needed to achieve excellence is willingness on the part of the student, adequate provision of modern facilities and manpower. Moreso, the direct translation of academic excellence to high employability chances may not have been a reality after all. It is suggested from all evidence that the bulk work lies with the provision of employment opportunities rather than targeting to achieve academic excellence as some first class students find themselves underemployed and sometimes, less paid. This is evident as Asuquo and Agboola (2014) argued that majority of graduates who are degree holders (Bachelor, Masters and Doctorates Degree holders) remain unemployed and for those employed, there are allegations by their employers, that most Nigeria University graduates lack job related skills and perform below expectation: a clear evidence of poorly setup educational curriculum and lack of provision of modern teaching facilities.

A positive shift in our educational curriculum and provision of modern facilities cum application of modern educational technologies is certain to achieve the excellence in students as desired by them all. Has this positive change been made feasible over the years? In looking for the answer to that question, Osokoya (2008) opined that Nigeria's education system has failed to usher in the desired expansion of available facilities and resources quantitatively and qualitatively with a view to producing a better and greater nation. The goals of University education remains elusive and seems unachievable as the universities products (graduates) in Nigeria often time could not marry knowledge acquired in schools with that of the labour market (Olofintoye, & Prince, 2013). In this regards, a failed system cannot produce excellence, of course. Education generally in Nigeria has been neglected with University education been the worst hit by successive governments in terms of effective management, quality control and provision of adequate quality resources for effective teaching and learning (Asuquo and Agboola 2014). According the authors, reasonable efforts have been made to improve the quality of universities education in the past, yet with all these efforts, it appears only few students achieve excellence as a result. Those who perform higher are believed to be naturally intelligent with little push and encouragement from the poorly equipped Nigerian educational system, while those low performers are merely struggling to cope with the dysfunctional system of education in Nigeria. This therefore, suggests that one should have a natural gift of intelligence to be able to perform highly vis-avis the teaching standard in the system.

In all these, majority of those graduates who by little opportunities available in the system achieved excellence at degree level (Bachelor, Masters and Doctorates Degree holders) remain unemployed and for those employed, there are allegations of under payment and underemployment, while some have changed

careers just to be suitable for employability chances the Nigerian labour market has to offer.

Employability here refers to the capability to gain and maintain employment (Hind & Moss, 2011). Necessary skills and knowledge are highly required for one to gain and maintain employment in Nigeria and even, elsewhere. Employability skills which are skills necessary for getting, keeping and doing well on a job are very important for all employees to be an asset to the labour market. These skills include attitudes and actions that enable workers to get along with their fellow workers and supervisors and to make sound and critical decisions (Brown & Hesketh, 2004). Skills necessary for employability are skills majorly taught and promoted in Business Education programme.

Business Education is a programme of study which after well taught by professional teachers and well understood by students, equips such students with necessary knowledge, attitude, mental alertness and practical skills required for excellent adaptation to business and work environment after school, (Ugwu 2020). Business Education is concerned with equipping the recipients with skills needed for employment and self-reliance (Ezeabii, Chibuike and Udeh 2019). It is a programme that possesses in itself, the qualities and values that reduces employment in the society. Where facilities and manpower are adequately provided, achieving academic excellence is equal to certainty in business education programme. Ezeabii, Chibuike and Udeh (2019) also argued that Business Education is the education that provides the individual with technical competencies that will enable the individual to attain self-realization in the field of work and in business world. Business education involves teaching students the fundamentals, theories and processes of business (Chibuike 2013). The author cited Dhaka (2011) to have opined that Business Education typically prepares students for an occupation in business or a business related field or a teaching career in academics. That is, those who teach in both private and public tertiary institutions. There are four public tertiary institutions offering Business Education programme in Enugu State: University of Nigeria, Federal College of Education, Eha-Amufu, Enugu State University of Science and Technology and Enugu State College of Education, (Technical). The question here is “has the academic excellence achieved by students of this programme guaranteed them employability chances in the Nigerian labour market?” This is where the relationship between academic excellence and high chances of employability comes in.

Statement of the problem

It's a common notion in the society that achieving academic excellence is equal to getting befitting job on graduation. This has made some parents who believe in this idea to pressure their wards so hard to achieve such grades as First and Second Class

Honours. While some students who are not ready to buy into such pressure and are probably very talented in some other skill sets are considered dullards who may never be employable after school. Experience has shown that sometimes those who are considered dullards become more successful in the labour market, yet some other times, those with high academic performance become better. Does it mean that success in the labour market is by chance? Could it also be that lack of job opportunities is responsible for the continued belief in that ideology? These questions motivated the researcher to carry out this study hoping to get responses directly from the graduates who are in the group of academic high and lower achievers. The two groups (Academic High Achievers otherwise, referred to as First Class, Merit, Second Class and Upper Credit graduates by the researcher and Academic Low Achievers, referred to as other lower grade graduates by the researcher) will be testifying to the stated idea that achieving academic excellence is equal to getting befitting job on graduation in the Nigeria labour market.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to ascertain if academic excellence is a yardstick for employability in Nigerian labour market. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Assess the relationship between academic high performance and employability in Nigeria.
2. Determine the relationship between academic low performance and employability in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between academic high performance and employability in Nigeria?
2. What is the relationship between academic low performance and employability in Nigeria?

Statement of Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were used for the study and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between the mean responses of High and Low achieving Business Education graduates on the relationship between academic high performance and employability in Nigeria.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between the mean responses of High and Low achieving Business Education graduates on the relationship between academic low performance and employability in Nigeria.

METHOD

The design adopted for this study was a descriptive survey research design. A descriptive survey research design according to Nworgu (2015) is one in

which a group of people or items are studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire population. This design would be used because it involves the assessment of public opinion using questionnaire and sample methods. The study was conducted in the public tertiary institutions in Enugu State offering Business Education programme. The population of the study comprised of 173 Business Education graduates from the six tertiary institutions offering Business Education programme in Enugu State. This 173 member-population were graduates from 2019/2020 academic session who were traced through their various authentic WhatsApp groups. The choice of the respondents was made because they are already in the job market and can give better account for the research questions under review. No sampling was carried out since the population was manageable.

The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher. The instrument was divided into two categories (A and B); category A contained the personal data of the respondents while B contained 17 items grouped into two sub-sections according to the research questions that guided the study. The instrument was based on four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1)

Thus: 3.50 - 4.00 Strongly Agree
2.50 - 3.49 Agree

1.50 - 2.49 Disagree
1.00 - 1.49 Strongly Disagree

The instrument was face-validated by three experts and the reliability of the instrument was conducted using Cronbach Alpha which yielded a coefficient of 0.88. Copies of the questionnaire were distributed by the researcher through WhatsApp and one on one contact. Out of the 173 copies administered, 160 copies were properly filled and therefore used for data analysis representing 93% return rate. The Standard Deviation was used to determine the homogeneity or deviation of the respondents' mean ratings. The correlation statistics was used to test the null hypothesis at .05 level of significance, that is: if there is a significant relationship between the mean responses of the High and Low achieving students. In testing the hypotheses, when the correlation showed a "significant relationship" value, the null hypothesis was rejected, otherwise do not reject.

RESULTS

The results were presented in tables 1 to 4 according to the research questions and null hypothesis that guided the study.

Research Question 1

What is the relationship between academic excellence and employability in Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean responses and Standard deviation of the respondents on the relationship between academic excellence and employability in Nigeria

S/N	Item Description	High Achievers N=60		Low Achievers N=100		Overall X	Overall SD	Decision
		X	SD	X	SD			
1	High and low achievers get jobs at same rate	3.13	2.70	3.35	2.85	3.24	2.78	Agreed
2	Doing well on the job does not depend on grade	3.10	2.64	2.80	2.23	2.95	2.44	Agreed
3	High achievers are more creative on jobs	3.02	2.50	2.90	2.35	2.96	2.43	Agreed
4	Employment is by chance in Nigeria	3.40	2.79	3.22	2.60	3.31	2.70	Agreed
5	Academic excellence is immaterial in Nigeria labour market	3.20	2.78	2.80	2.07	3.00	2.43	Agreed
6	Job retention is not based on grade achieved	3.15	2.60	2.86	2.44	3.01	2.52	Agreed
7	Employers seek quality skills than grade	3.03	2.36	2.86	2.23	2.95	2.30	Agreed
8	Graduates with good working attitudes are more successful on the job	3.12	2.87	3.22	2.58	3.17	2.73	Agreed
9	Good skills boost chances of employability	3.28	2.82	2.86	2.33	3.07	2.58	Agreed
10	Job performance is a function of on-the-job training and retraining	3.27	2.61	2.78	2.11	3.02	2.36	Agreed
	Grand mean/standard deviation	3.17	2.67	2.97	2.38	3.07	2.52	Agreed

The result of data analysis presented in Table 1 above showed that the respondents agreed in all the items with mean responses ranging from 2.78 to 3.40. The grand mean of 3.07 further showed that the respondents agreed to the ten items as proof of relationship between academic excellence and employability in Nigeria. The low standard deviation

obtained showed that the respondents have similar opinion to the items as proof of relationship between academic excellence and employability among Business Education students in public tertiary institutions in Enugu State.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between the mean responses of High and Low achieving students

on the relationship between academic high performance and employability in Nigeria.

Table 2: Correlation statistics of the mean responses of High and Low achieving Students in tertiary institutions in Enugu State on the relationship between academic high performance and employability in Nigeria

	High Achievers	Low Achievers
High Achievers	1	
Low Achievers	0.150396883	1

The result of correlation statistical analysis in Table 2 showed that the correlation between the mean responses of High and Low achieving Business Education Students in public tertiary institutions in Enugu state at 0.150396883 is positively insignificant, pointing to the fact that Business Education students' responses from each group are uniquely different, independent and unbiased which therefore means that the responses from each group do not depend on the responses of each another. The null hypothesis is not

rejected since the correlation values are insignificant. Therefore there is no significant relationship between the mean responses of High and Low achieving students on the relationship between academic high performance and employability in Nigeria.

Research Question 2

What is the relationship between academic low performance and employability in Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean responses and Standard deviation of the respondents on the relationship between academic low performance and employability in Nigeria

S/N	Item Description	High Achievers		Low Achievers		Overall X	Overall SD	Decision
		N=60		N=100				
		X	SD	X	SD			
1	Low achievers are also smart on the job	2.92	2.47	3.18	2.60	3.05	2.54	Agreed
2	Employers seek skills more than grade	3.03	2.32	3.39	3.09	3.21	2.70	Agreed
3	Good grade does not guarantee employability	2.98	2.36	3.09	2.36	3.04	2.36	Agreed
4	Job creation is targeted at both high and low achievers	3.23	2.61	3.35	2.99	3.29	2.80	Agreed
5	Job creation is more important than creating high achievers	3.15	2.73	2.81	2.18	2.98	2.45	Agreed
6	Employability depends on job availability	2.89	2.33	2.61	2.17	2.75	2.25	Agreed
7	Valuable skills give jobs more than grade	3.02	2.63	2.97	2.26	2.99	2.45	Agreed
	Grand mean/standard deviation	3.03	2.49	3.06	2.52	3.04	2.51	Agreed

The result of data analysis presented in Table 3 above showed that the respondents agreed in all the 7 items with mean responses ranging from 2.61 to 3.39. The grand mean of 3.04 further showed that the respondents agreed to the seven items as proof of relationship between academic low performance and employability in Nigeria. The low standard deviation obtained showed that the respondents have consensus opinion to the itemized as proof of relationship between

academic low performance and employability in Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between the mean responses of High and Low achieving graduates on the relationship between academic low performance and employability Nigeria.

Table 4: Correlation statistics of the mean responses of High and Low achieving Business Education graduates on the relationship between academic low performance and employability Nigeria

	High Achievers	Low Achievers
High Achievers	1	
Low Achievers	0.385803926	1

The result of correlation statistical analysis in Table 4 showed that the correlation between the mean responses of High and Low achieving Business Education graduates in public tertiary institutions in Enugu State at 0.385803926 is positively

insignificantly, proving that the Business Education graduates' responses from each group are uniquely different, independent and unbiased which therefore means that the responses from each group do not depend on the responses of each other. The null

hypothesis is not rejected since the correlation values are insignificant. Therefore there is no significant relationship between the mean responses of High and Low achieving Business Education graduates on the relationship between academic low performance and employability Nigeria.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study were discussed in line with the responses to the research questions and hypotheses tested for the study. The findings of the study according to research question one showed that High and low achievers get jobs at same rate, Doing well on the job does not depend on grade, High achievers are more creative on jobs, Employment is by chance in Nigeria, Academic excellence is immaterial in Nigeria labour market, Job retention is not based on grade achieved, Employers seek quality skills than grade, Graduates with good working attitudes are more successful on the job, Good skills boost chances of employability and Job performance is a function of on-the-job training and retraining were proof that there is no relationship between academic high performance and employability in Nigeria. This findings corroborates with the study by Asuquo & Agboola (2014) whose findings revealed that the employability of Nigerian Universities outputs is low and the rating of these Universities outputs were insignificantly different with respects to organization where they work (public or private) and their educational qualification. In the same vein, Dabalem, Oni & Adekoya (2000) opined that the Nigerian employability of Nigerian graduates is outrightly poor. This implies that major relationship between academic high performance and employability does not exist. It is very imperative that jobs are created rather than canvas for academic excellence as a gateway for employability in the labour market. This is because, when enough job opportunities are created, both the academic high and lower performers will be gainfully employed.

Hypothetically, findings also showed that there is no significant relationship between the mean responses of High and Low achieving students on the relationship between academic high performance and employability in Nigeria. This means that academic performance does not influence chances of gainful employment in Nigeria.

In furtherance, findings showed that the 7 identified items in research question 2 stands as proof that there is no relationship between academic low performance and employability in Nigeria. The items identified showed that: Low achievers are also smart on the job, Employers seek skills more than grade, Good grade does not guarantee employability, Job creation is targeted at both high and low achievers, Job creation is more important than creating high achievers, Employability depends on job availability and Valuable skills give jobs more than grade. The entire respondents

agreed that all the enumerated items in research question 2 were proof that there is no relationship between academic low performance and employability in Nigeria. In support of the above findings, Yusuf, Okanlawon & Metu (2018) opined that graduates with the same qualification have flooded the labour market seeking or struggling for the available limited jobs. According to Tran (2016), graduates' employment model has taken a new dimension all over the world. The author maintained that labour market no longer employ based on academic achievement but on skills, attitude to job and performance.

The implication of the study is that jobs should be created massively rather than focusing on academic excellence for employability. If job opportunities are created, graduates of all grades will have jobs and those intelligent students who have high performance in the school will simply stand out among their peers. This will pave way for brilliant students to naturally graduate with high grade rather than acquire or buy grades that they cannot defend because of societal pressure.

CONCLUSION

The study has provided evidential items to prove that employability of graduates is dependent on grades achieved in the school, especially in Nigeria; at least, from the view of some selected graduates from public tertiary institutions in Enugu State who studied Business Education. It is revealed in the study that academic excellence has no relationship with employability in Nigeria labour market. The study concluded that rather than focus on achieving academic high performance through whatever means available to students, emphasis should be laid more on job creation and skill acquisition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Attention should be shifted from academic excellence as yardstick for employability in Nigeria so that students are not pressured into dubious means just to graduate with high grades since findings of the study has shown that the both variables has no direct relationship.
2. Employment opportunities should be massively created for all enough for both high and low academic performers since the findings of the study revealed those with low academic performance can also have valuable skills capable of keeping them on the job for as long as they intend to.

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