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Demand for University Education and Students' Employment Prospects in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Employment prospects of Nigerian undergraduates remain questionable while demand for university education is on the increase. This study, adopted descriptive research design. A sample of 380 students of public universities in Osun State, drawn from 36,333 undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife and Osun State University, Osogbo, were the respondents using multi-stage sampling procedure. A Students' Employment Prospects and Demand for University Education Questionnaire (SEP-DUEQ) was designed to elicit information from respondents. The result identified decision to become entrepreneur 266(70.9%), acquiring knowledge of intended profession 262(69.8%), earning high salary after graduation 251(66.9%), among others as reasons for demanding university education. The result also showed that employment prospects available to students after graduation include entrepreneurial skills to create job 298(78.5%), sufficient job opportunity in private-sector organisations 252(67.2%) and high access to fund to start businesses 235(62.7%). The study recommends that university education in Nigeria should be restructured to enhance students' employment prospects

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1. INTRODUCTION

University education is becoming increasingly essential in the world today due to the fact that it supplies manpower requirement for all sectors of the economy. This indicates that the development of any nation is built around university education and has necessitated more students seeking admission into the university in order to become holders of university requisite degree and keep pace with societal and market demand. As a result, university education is facing a stiff challenge in terms of rapid increase in its demand without corresponding increase in facilities and inputs. It is no doubt that people continue to demand for university education

to have better opportunity in the labour market and to satisfy the quest of self-actualization. Nonetheless, unemployment seems to be the bane of many nations as graduates in several disciplines from different universities remain jobless. This might be because university education in Nigeria can no longer satisfy the dynamic nature of societal requirements and market demand.

The available data as reported by South African News Agency (2022), shows that the overall unemployment rate in South Africa's unemployment was 34.5% (7.9 million) in the first quarter of 2022. In addition, the National Bureau of Statistics (2021a & b) reported that the unemployment rate of first, master as well as doctoral degree holders in Nigeria rose to 2.9 million (35%) in 2021, the highest over a decade. According to Okafor (2022) of 181 countries with unpalatable unemployment record, Nigeria ranks as the 41st highest. Okafor also informs that this situation will continue to increase as more university graduate join a weak economy at creating job. In spite of the increase in graduate unemployment, the demand for university education seems to be on the increase. Study by Mok and Jiang (2016) indicates that some Asian countries such as South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong and China have a record of higher education expansion in terms of demand. Mok and Jiang also found that in China, higher education enrolment increases from 0.67 million in 1988 to 1.08 million in 1998, and then increased geometrically from 1.6 million in 1999 to 6.89 million in 2012. In Nigeria, the total number of candidates seeking admission into universities rose from 1.5 million in 2010 to 1.94 million in 2021 (The Punch News, 2017; University Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) Officials, 2021).

It is instructive to note that knowledge and skills acquired by students are parts of the pivotal factors that could determine their employment prospects. Moreover, students who passed the stipulated courses and have satisfied the graduating requirement of the university are awarded degree certificates, which is expected to enable them secure employment in the labour market, but the situation as witnessed by many graduates shows a contrast. Certificates awarded by the universities seems not to be a sufficient consideration to guarantee students' employment. This simply infers that there are other pertinent indices which could enhance students' employment in the labour market apart from certificates one of which is job availability. This study therefore examines the factors within the context of university education demand and provides information on students' employment after graduation.

University education is described as the teaching and training provided by universities for the purpose of preparing individuals to work in different sectors of a nation's economy. University education could also be referred to as the totality of the overall and specific or specialized knowledge and skills acquired by university graduates which enables them to provide solutions to problems they are likely to face in their field of occupation or to carry out scientific study within the area of specialized knowledge which they have acquired (Goetze, 2019). Alemu (2018) submits that providing an appropriate definition of university education is somewhat a difficult task considering the goals and institutional diversification of a nation, however, Alemu considered it as a type of education dominant in the area of research offered to award degree to its recipients

Study by Aldridge and Rowley (2013) underscores that one of the common goal which both students, staff and the entire academic community of a university seeks to achieve is to create and maintain good standards and quality of the university programmes and services. In Nigeria, the Federal Government (2013) in her National Policy on Education (NPE) document submits that the goals of university education shall be to contribute to national development through high level relevant manpower training; develop and inculcate proper values for the survival of the individual and society; develop the intellectual capability of individuals to understand and appreciate their local and external environments; acquire both physical and

intellectual skills which will enable individuals to be self-reliant and useful members of the society; promote and encourage scholarship and community service; forge and cement national unity; and promote national and international understanding and interaction. These goals emphasise the great value placed on university education by Nigerian government, thereby making it a commodity for the demand of all citizens.

According to Ayanlowo (2021), demand for university education is a concept that is best described in relation to socio-economic variables. This is because university education is considered as a product that is made available for consumers to purchase and derive their satisfaction therein. Thus, the individuals' choices made by consumers as to education goods/products made available to them at a particular price becomes important to examine. University education demand can be described as the total amount or quantity of the education commodity which individuals are able to purchase in the university at a given price and over a particular period of time (Nasib, 2017).

According to Fägerlind and Saha (2016), demand for university education can be viewed as both investments and consumption goods. Investment in education is considered as current expenses for future earnings; and in such a case where future earnings are expected to be higher than current alternative choice of economic activity, it then becomes more beneficial to invest in education. University education is considered as consumption goods when it offers immediate satisfaction to the educated. Sarpkaya (2010) posits that university education can be privately or socially demanded. Private demand means the enrolment of individual student in different courses of study in the university education system. Social demand on its own is the aggregate or sum total of individual demand for education at the university level.

It is instructive to note that the price of education (supply and demand) is an important indicator to consider in order to better conceptualize university education demand. The supply price is the price at which university education can be offered to the general public taking into consideration both government and non-governmental spending on provision of educational services, meanwhile the demand price involves the price which consumers are willing to pay for the university education products (Nasib, 2017).

Aside price of education, study by Gabriel (2014) posits that demand for university education is predicated on social factors, personal disposable income, preferences and taste as well as the magnitude of programme demanded. Meanwhile, Gölpek and Çiftçiöğlü (2014) agree that financial benefits in form of high income is a major determinant of demand for university education. Muthui (2013) in his own view postulates that individual factors, reference groups, financial consideration and institutional factors all have positive influence on demand for university education. In addition, findings by Senior and Howard (2014) establish that peer influence is one of the major factors that determines students' demand choice and/or decision to study in the university. Moreover, Neştian et al. (2021) postulated that among reasons why students demand for university education is enhancement of knowledge which can help students to build higher-order thinking skills towards increasing their chances of employment. Contrary to this Čepar and Bojnec (2010) stressed that demographic changes contribute significantly to university education demand. Meanwhile, Ali and Jalal (2018) established that university education is a positive and strong predictor of employment for prospective graduate students.

In the view of Ayanlowo (2021), employment prospects of university students is currently a matter of great concern for stakeholders in education and the entire Nigerian society. This is because securing employment is central to the pursuit of most students desiring to be awarded a university degree in Nigeria. Martini, Mariani and Cavenago (2018) opine that employment prospects is the likelihood of an individual to successfully move into the labour market in order to realize his/her potentials through sustainable occupation. Paterson (2017)

views employment prospects as sets of achievements in terms of skills or personal attributes that enables prospective graduates not only to gain their desired occupation but also to be prosperous in their chosen professions.

Basically, a key element inherent in all of the definitions of employment prospects given by scholars is the increase in one's opportunity to secure employment. Findings by Shumilova, Cai and Pekkola (2013) establish that graduates with high level of the employability skills and competencies have better chances of being employed. This underscores the need for universities to play their role of equipping students with the required job skills so as to improve their employment chances after graduation. However, Xiaohao and Changjun (2013) identify decline in employment rate, reduction in starting salary and structural disparity in occupation as major trends of the entry level employees which are predicated on the prevailing global economic downturn.

In spite of the huge threat contending students' employment prospects, Bennett, Richardson and MacKinnon (2016) submit that development of career awareness, development of skills and knowledge and development of employability framework are pivotal factors that can enhance employment of university students after graduation. Moreover, findings by Thune and Støren (2015) advance that students' interaction with work organizations provides them relevant competencies and increases students' job prospects. Ayatse (2013) posits that provision of adequate incentives in form of start-up capital for students who have acquired skills to establish their businesses is a major strategy to promote employment opportunities for youths. Dania, Bakar and Mohamed (2014) also support that acquisition of vocational skills positively imparts employment and career development activities of students.

It could be concluded that university education is to produce human capital to manage all sectors of the economy effectively and to place beneficiary in a better position in securing employment that will improve their standard of living with better pay. However, this depends on the quality of education provided by the university to the recipient. The desire of people for quality university education might be why people invest in university education in the top leading universities across the world. The importance of university education to the recipient and the entire society makes it imperative for increase in its demand across the globe. Despite the challenge of employment confronting university degree holders, scholar's points out that university education increases the opportunity of beneficiaries to secure employment. This is hinged on the fact that university graduates with requisite employment skills and competencies do not suffer from unemployment syndrome.

Problem

University education is designed and structured to prepare students for work in the various sectors of the economy. This indicates that university education is expected to provide better opportunity for graduates to be employed in the labour market by providing knowledge, skills and training needed by employers of labour. However, it has been observed that unemployment remains the bane of many university graduates as majority of them are found roaming the street after graduation. The increasing rate of unemployment is so alarming that Ghafar (2016) reported that unemployment rate increases with the level of educational attainment with university graduates at a high peril of this menace; and even in the face of high graduate unemployment, demand for university education continues to increase. Therefore, this study investigates factors associated with students' demand for university education and employment prospects.

Research Questions

- i. What are the reasons why students demand university education inn Nigeria?

ii. What are the employment prospects available for students after university education in Nigeria?

2. METHOD

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population for the study comprised 28,876 undergraduates of Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife and 7,457 undergraduates of Osun State University (UNIOSUN); given a total of 36,333 students in the two public universities in Osun State, Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique was used to select five Faculties/Colleges from each university with four-year duration of programmes. This is to ensure uniformity of programme duration of students sampled. Also, Students at the levels selected are expected to have been exposed to various employment opportunities that will likely be available to them after graduation. Moreover, random sampling technique was used to select 38 undergraduates at 300 and 400 level each from each of the Faculties/Colleges selected, thereby constituting 190 undergraduates from each university. A self-designed questionnaire titled “Students’ Employment Prospects and Demand for University Education Questionnaire (SEP-DUEQ)” was administered on the respondents. The instrument has three sections. Specifically, Section A contained items on demographic information of undergraduates. Section B and C contained items that measure demand for university education and students’ employment prospects respectively. Of the instruments administered, five could not be used because they were not properly filled by respondents. The data obtained were analysed using simple percentage to answer the research questions raised.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

Research Question One: *What are the reasons why student demand university education in Nigeria?*

To answer this, the students’ responses were calculated using frequency counts and percentages. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Factors that Determine Demand for University Education (N=375)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD
	Demand for University Education	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
1.	Securing job after graduation.	77 (20.5)	146 (38.9)	107 (28.5)	41 (10.9)
2.	Possessing knowledge of the intended profession	98 (26.1)	164 (43.7)	88 (23.5)	23 (6.1)
3.	Earning high salary after graduation	108 (28.8)	143 (38.1)	93 (24.8)	27 (7.2)
4.	Financial capacity of the family to pay	94 (25.1)	152 (40.5)	82 (21.9)	40 (10.7)
5.	Decision to become an entrepreneur	90 (24.0)	176 (46.9)	79 (21.1)	28 (7.5)
6.	Parental decision to study in the university	50 (13.3)	84 (22.4)	150 (44.0)	81 (21.6)

Notes: SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strong Disagree

Table 1 shows the various reasons why students demand for university education. Decision to become entrepreneur 266(70.9%) was the highest reason for students’ demand. This was followed by acquiring knowledge of intended profession 262(69.8%), earning high salary after graduation 251(66.9%), families’ financial ability to pay their fees 246(65.6%) and securing job after graduation 223(59.4%). Meanwhile, students’ disagreed that studying in the university is their parents’ decision 231(65.6%). The table therefore reveals five major reasons

why students demand for university education. This implies that education provided at the university level should address students' employment needs.

Research Question Two: *What are the employment prospects available for students after university education in Nigeria?*

To answer this, the students' responses were calculated using frequency counts and percentages. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Students' Employment Prospects after University Education (N=375)

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD
	Students' Employment Prospects	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)	f (%)
1.	Ample job opportunity in private organisations	63 (16.8)	157 (41.9)	108 (28.8)	45 (12.0)
2.	Sufficient employment in government Ministries/Departments	63 (16.8)	149 (39.7)	124 (33.1)	38 (10.1)
3.	Enough jobs are available in non-governmental organisations.	62 (16.5)	190 (50.7)	98 (26.1)	19 (5.1)
4.	Insufficient job opportunity in private-sector organisations	51 (13.6)	153 (40.8)	150 (40.0)	54 (14.4)
5.	No job guarantee in public-sector organisations	51 (13.6)	115 (30.7)	112 (29.9)	34 (9.1)
6.	Inadequate job prospects in non-governmental organisations	59 (15.7)	134 (35.7)	132 (35.2)	40 (10.7)
7.	Entrepreneurial skills to create job after graduation have been acquired	136 (35.3)	162 (43.2)	55 (14.7)	10 (2.7)
8.	There is high access to fund to create job after graduation	87 (23.2)	148 (39.5)	106 (28.3)	29 (7.7)

Key: SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strong Disagree

Table 2 identifies the employment prospects of university students after graduation. Entrepreneurial skills to create jobs after graduation 298(78.5%) was the highest employment prospects for students. This was followed by sufficient job opportunity in non-governmental organisations 252(67.2%), high access to funds for personal jobs or businesses 235(62.7%), ample job opportunity in private organisations 220(58.7%) and sufficient employment opportunity in the government Ministries/Departments 212(56.5%). Meanwhile, job opportunities with public-sector organisations 221(58.9%) and non-governmental organisations 193(51.4%) after graduation were further considered insufficient. Whereas, respondents disagreed to having insufficient employment opportunities after graduation in private-sector organisations 204(54.4%). This shows that employment prospects available to undergraduates were limited to skills to create job, high access to fund to start businesses and sufficient job opportunity in private-sector organisations.

3.2 Discussion

Results from the finding on reasons for students' demand for university education posited that decision to become entrepreneur, acquiring knowledge of intended profession, earning high salary after graduation, families' financial ability to pay education fees and securing job after graduation were reasons for demanding university education. This implies that demand for university education could be described as a function of economic satisfaction of potential graduates among which are gainful employment and high income.

This may account for why universities are facing enrolment explosion. The result was in line with the findings of Muthui (2013) who posited that university education is seen as an

essential passport for high earnings and mobility into high socio-economic class of the society. It is also in agreement with the findings of Nasib (2017) that demand for education is determined by price which clienteles are willing and able to pay for the education products. Neştian et al. (2021) who suggested that enhancement of knowledge, successful work life and opportunity to increase earnings should major reasons for university education demand. Lending credence to the results is Gölpek and Çiftçioğlu (2014) who found that explosion in demand and enrolment of university education is attributed to the expected yield of returns in terms of good jobs, better remuneration and high standard of living. However, the finding negates that of Senior and Howard (2014) who found that peer influence is a predominant reason for demanding university education.

On students' perception of employment prospects available to them after graduation, the results indicated that acquiring entrepreneurial skills to create jobs, high access to fund to create jobs and sufficient employment opportunity in private-sector organisations are employment prospects for undergraduates after graduation. Responsible for students' opinion of sufficient job opportunity in private-sector organisations may be attributed to the general believe that recruitment of new workforce in private organisations is usually based on merit because they are profit oriented and they will like to sustain their relevance in the corporate world, unlike the public organisations where recruitment is perceived to be based on relationship and family ties usually called "man-know-man". Moreover, students' skills acquisition to create personal jobs may be as a result of establishing self-owned businesses during schooling, which will to be sustained after graduation, as it has been observed that many graduate students remained unemployment after several years of barging a degree.

This result agreed with the findings of Xiaohao and Changjun (2013) who established that private sector organisations are important socio-economic units where graduates are mainly employed. It is also in line with the findings of Bennett et al. (2016) submitted that acquisition of relevant and appropriate skills is fundamental to helping individuals to contribute to national development through their work life engagement as emphasized by the Nigeria's national policy on education. Similarly, result agreed with that of Ayatse (2013) who concluded that provision of adequate start-up capital will encourage graduate students who have acquired job skills to establish their businesses and start their entrepreneurial career after school. On the contrary, the findings contradict Ghafar (2016) who stressed that students' employment could be uncertain as unemployment increases relative to graduate students' qualifications.

4. CONCLUSION

The reality of unemployment in today's challenging and competitive world is of course a great threat to university students. It is worrisome to note that majority of Nigerian graduates are either unemployed or underemployed thereby damping the hope of undergraduates for a secured and profitable work life. Evidently, reasons for demanding university education include decision to become entrepreneur, acquiring knowledge of intended profession, earning high salary after graduation, families' financial ability to pay education fees and securing job after graduation. Meanwhile, employment prospects available for undergraduates after graduation are acquiring entrepreneurial skills to create jobs, high access to fund to create jobs and sufficient employment opportunity in private-sector organisations. Thus, it is essential that university education be better planned and delivered to accommodate the needs of the learners which strongly reflect their desire to gainfully employed after graduation. **Recommendation.** Based on the findings of this study, the following were recommended: education provided to undergraduates at the university level be tailored to address their economic needs; government at all levels, as well as wealthy individuals should create more job opportunities in order to enhance students' employment prospects after graduation. Likewise, the government should

create a conducive environment for graduates, who are prospective entry-level entrepreneurs to thrive by enacting tax friendly policies and providing them unequivocal access to financial resources to kick-start their businesses.

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