

## **RELEVANT HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM FOR MITIGATING UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE TRAUMA OF NO LONGER BEING NEEDED**

**Charles M. Anikweze Prof**

Educational Measurement & Evaluation  
Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria

&

**Christiana A. Ugodulunwa Prof**

Educational Measurement and Evaluation  
Alex Ekwueme Federal University  
Ndufu-Alike Ikwo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

### **Abstract**

*The match between education and job is an important indication of the functioning of the labour market. To achieve this match, higher education curriculum has to be dynamic and relevant to address the changes in contemporary world of work and meet the needs of industries. This is because the tripod of curriculum, certification and world of work presupposes that individuals have to pass through some form of sequenced educational programme to produce qualified graduates with identifiable knowledge base and skills, who are competent and employable. This paper therefore clarified the concepts of curriculum, curriculum relevance in higher education, graduate unemployment and trauma. It examined how the different components of higher education curriculum can be made relevant to meet the knowledge and skill needs of graduates in order to mitigate unemployment and attendant psychological trauma of no longer needed. The need to integrate and rely on educational technologies in curriculum and instruction, laboratories, assignment design, and libraries were stressed. Specifically, linking research to instructional strategies, integration across curriculum, diversity learning, internationalization, learning communities, collaborative and inter-disciplinary studies, innovative instructional methods, innovative assessment techniques, and partnership with industries were discussed as potent strategies for making higher education curriculum relevant for producing employable graduates in the global world of work. It was concluded that it is only when higher education has consistently crafted most profound changes in contemporary world of work such as leadership abilities, problem solving skills, technology-driven learning, among others that graduates would be adequately prepared to work.*

## **Introduction**

Work is an important component of daily life and personal development which gives an individual financial security, personal well-being, and guarantees a meaningful life. However, global economic recession meant that work environments have changed and unemployment and its related problems among the youth are now social issues globally as observed by Kito and Ueno (2016). Graduate employability is a global problem particularly with changing technology for faster and sophisticated ones found in different sectors of economy and employment. These changes require graduates with academic knowledge, technical skills and soft skills to fulfill the requirements of employers of labour in different sectors of economy, including education in Nigeria (Ugodulunwa & Mustapha, 2015). Furthermore, global economic recession meant that work environments have changed, and unemployment and its related problems among the youth are current social issues globally. Consequently, higher education curricula are being reviewed, especially in developing countries in order to make them relevant to meet the changing needs of in order to address global challenges and needs of employers and industries in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century world of work. It has been observed (Blustein, 2008; Paul & Moser, 2009) that unemployment influences people in different ways, which impact them negatively. It is therefore assumed that unemployment and its attendant problems, such as trauma can be reduced relevant higher education curriculum.

The tripod of curriculum, certification and world of work presupposes that some individuals have to pass through some form of sequenced educational programme with intent to graduate as qualified personnel with identifiable knowledge base, skills and affective qualities. The completion of such programme of education is usually confirmed by certification whose authentic value depends on the output of the beneficiaries when trusted with responsibilities at the place of employment. Thus, there is high expectation that any student that has successfully passed through a system of education, particularly in a tertiary institution and has, during the graduation ceremony, been declared worthy in learning and character, should be able to put up an impressive performance when engaged in the world of work. However, a number of influencing factors might serve as conditions precedent before such an expectation will be fulfilled. The factors include the standard of the planned curriculum and its implementation, assessment of learning achievement for certification, the standard of the certificate, and the environmental circumstances of the place of deployment. Interestingly, the changing world is a topical issue in higher education in order to prepare students adequately to live in the ever-changing world of work.

In Nigeria, many graduates are unemployed because only few but highly competitive vacancies exist (Ajiboye, Oyebanji & Awoniyi, 2013). Three out of ten graduates of higher education are unemployed and many are compelled to engage in jobs that do not require their qualifications (Akanmu, 2011). The Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria (2017) report shows that the unemployment rate rose from 14.2% to 18.8% in 2017. This can be attributed to the rising unemployment crisis in Nigeria to partly lack of employment opportunities and lack of employability development many of the graduates and lack of essential employability skills in higher education curriculum as observed by Akanmu (2011). This paper therefore conceptualized curriculum, certification, world of work, graduate unemployment and outplacement, trauma of unemployment, as well as curriculum relevance. It examined curriculum of studies and manpower production and also gave insights on how higher education curriculum can be made relevant to mitigate unemployment and its attendant trauma.

### **Operational Definition of Terms**

Our sub-theme contains what may be described as a tripod of focal attention, viz: Curriculum, Certification and the World of Work. We would take a look at what these terms mean in the context of the theme of this conference and provide some details that contextualize their interrelationships.

### **Concept of curriculum**

Curriculum has been generally conceptualized as all learning experiences to which pupils or students involved in formal education are exposed to for purposes of changing their behaviours in terms of knowledge acquisition, skills development and character education. The Encyclopedia of Educational Research (1969) defines curriculum as all the experiences a learner has at school under the guidance of the teacher. In this definition, the role of the teacher is inevitable in translating curriculum objectives into activities. It is therefore not surprising that the Dictionary of Education defines curriculum as the total learning activities or educative experience offered by an institution through its total instructional programmes designed to achieve the prescribed objectives. Invariably, it is the teacher who implements the instructional programmes. Microsoft Encarta (2009) also defines curriculum as the course offerings of an educational institution. It adds that decisions about what a school should teach in terms of subjects or the topics taught within a subject are usually made by school administrators and faculty. In this case also, the role of the teacher is automatically implicated in the implementation of any educational curriculum.

In line with the foregoing definitions, Offorma (2005) may have been right to regard curriculum as the planned experiences offered to a learner in school and consisting of three components, namely: programme of studies, programme of activities and programme of guidance. In our context, curriculum should be tied to quality of learning experiences since quality of learning is increasingly being recognized as a fundamental factor in achieving the goals of education. Indeed, the quality higher education is the outcome of all aspects of measurable learning experiences especially in essential life skills. Thus, the teacher's constant challenge would be to narrow the gap between the implemented curriculum (what teacher has taught) and the attained curriculum (what learners have mastered).

### **Concept of Certification**

A certificate can be described as a document that provides official evidence of an attainment or an official document that gives proof and details of something such as personal status, educational achievements, ownership, or authenticity (Microsoft Encarta, 2009). Certificates emerge as evidences of students' performance after a programme of study. Anikweze (2013) posits that when assessment procedures produce outcomes that are recorded, for whatever purposes, such records become documentary realities that could serve as reference points in future. The far-reaching implication of the documentary realities warrant the serious attention that is usually given to the key issues of assessment, namely: validity, reliability, consistency and objectivity. Hence, for certificates to have credibility, they must be based on authentic educational records. The educational records imply all evidences of formative and summative assessments duly quantified to reduce to the barest minimum possibilities of subjective and biased interpretations.

An authentic certificate should always enjoy public confidence, and for it to do so, it must go beyond cosmetics to provide verifiable data such as name of the awarding institution or board, name of the holder, year of graduation/certification, the host department or faculty, programme of studies or subjects passed with grades attained, standard/class of the certificate and the signature of the head of the awarding institution or board. Generally, authentic certificates carry the official seal of the institution that awards the certificate. In our context therefore, a certificate is not just any printed paper that testifies to attendance to a programme, but more importantly, one that conveys information on what, where, when, why, how and how well the student that graduated has performed. It is, in effect, an evidence of accountability, not only for the extent to which the student has exploited the opportunities offered by the institution, but also accountability of the teachers' commitment to duty

as well as accountability for the investments of both public funds and individual parents' financial contributions to the provision of education. Indeed, to certify, means to confirm the truth or accuracy of something written on the certificate.

### **Concept of World of Work**

The world of work has direct relationship with employment. It affects everyone in the workforce, male and female, young and old. The magnitude and direction of its effects depend on the skills and expertise possessed by fresh graduates to attract employment in the first instance, and secondly on the productivity manifested at the place of employment to avoid replacement by impatient business-minded employers. Expectedly therefore, fresh graduates are susceptible to supervisory oversight much more than those with many years of work experience. This is often referred to as probation period during which recently recruited labour is expected to demonstrate, in overt terms, the evidences of the type of educational curriculum that they passed through before certification. With fast changing technologies requiring currency in the skills and expertise of factory workers, an inevitable dynamism prevails in the world of work resulting in some employed workers becoming redundant and facing dismissal from employment.

Unfortunately, in most countries of the West African sub-region, there exists minimal outplacement to help those laid off to cope. Referring to outplacement occasioned by cascading dynamism in technology and innovations in occupational skills, Whedde (2011) stated that employees need not become friends with their recruiters for retention of their jobs. It is rather the quality of work that can guarantee development of sustainable career and avoidance of outplacement that is hard to come by. It is therefore expected that educational systems that are sensitive to rapid changes in global demand for specialised human resources, should innovate their higher education curricula such that their graduate outputs would, *ceteris paribus*, escape the growing unemployment that characterize the society everywhere in West Africa. Relevant higher education curriculum is therefore critically important so that graduates who can attract employment should be able to provide competent and impressive productivity in the world of work.

### **Unemployment and Outplacement**

Unemployment could be defined as the involuntary idleness occasioned by lack of employment (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2018). Further, according to Amadeo (2018), the Bureau of Labour Statistics defines the unemployed as people who do not have a job, have actively looked for work in the past four

weeks, and are currently available for work. It also includes people who were temporarily laid off and are waiting to be called back to their jobs.

Unemployment is often used to refer to the unemployment rate, which is the percentage of employable people in a country's workforce who are over the age of 16 and actively seeking for work. In this regard, there are three kinds of unemployment: (1) 'Frictional' when employable workers and employers lack information about the existence of each other; (2) 'Structural' when changing markets or new technologies make the skills of certain workers obsolete; and (3) 'Cyclical' when there is a general decline in business activity or recession concurrent with a typical economic cycle.

**Outplacement** refers to job-counselling that is offered to workers that have been dismissed from their employment, in most cases due to redundancy, since they could no longer fit into the system due to skill gap. A decade or two ago, people expected to work for the same firm or corporation until they got a gold watch at retirement. Today, many people are bound to cope with the trauma of 'no longer being needed' (Skarbovik, 2007). Incidentally, not a few that are rationalized out of employment possess the creative imagination to start a new business of the type celebrated by Mack (2014). Indeed, most people who lost their jobs in most countries of the West African sub-region succumb to dejection because outplacement services are either rare or do not exist at all; hence people that are thrown out of job merely swell the existing unemployment status of the society.

### **Trauma of Unemployment**

Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary defines trauma as a mental condition caused by unpleasant experience that makes one feel upset and/or anxious. Trauma of employment can be regarded as psychological consequences of one being without work. It is expected that work supplies the means for meeting physical needs of individuals and can satisfy creative urges, promote self-esteem and provide an avenue for achievement and self-realisation (Linn, Sandifer & Stein, 1985). On the other hand, unemployment creates condition of anxiety and depression, lowers an individual's self-esteem and produces physical health consequences. According to Menkes (2012), unemployment creates a psychological condition referred to as traumatic mind states, which may cause an individual to personalize the external circumstances as if they reveal some dark secret about worst deficiencies.

Evidence abound in literature that unemployment and underemployment of graduates are devastating phenomena in their lives

(Wiki, 2018) and the psychological consequences include increase anxiety, depression and low self-esteem (Linn, Sandifer & Stein, 1985). Since work is an important aspect of daily life and personal development which creates financial security, personal well-being and guarantees a meaningful life (Kito & Ueno, 2016), efforts directed towards reducing graduate unemployment should be considered paramount in dealing youth related problems and national development globally.

### **Curriculum Relevance**

Curriculum design has become increasingly important in higher education. The issue of curriculum relevance has also become an important discourse because of the need to ensure that students are exposed to learning experiences that will enable them face the challenge of global competitiveness in the ever changing world driven by technology and innovation. A curriculum is therefore considered to be relevant if it delivers real 21<sup>st</sup> century students, who can compete globally in the world of work. In the light of this, International Bureau of Education (2013) refers to curriculum relevance as one that is applicable and appropriate in meeting the needs, interests, aspirations, and expectations of learners and society in general. The process of developing a relevant curriculum should therefore frequently involve public discussion and consultation with a range of stakeholders, which include policymakers, experts, practitioners, and the society.

### **Curriculum of Studies and Manpower Production: Implications for Global Relevance**

We earlier conceptualized curriculum as all learning experiences to which students are exposed in educational institution with intent to induce learning or change in behaviour. The tripartite model of curriculum theory, and particularly the role of the teacher, has necessitated the categorization of curriculum into three types - the intended, the implemented and the attained (Schmidt, McKnight, Valverde, Houang, & Wiley, 1997).

The Intended Curriculum consists of all the programmes designed by policy makers and experts based on what is considered best for learners to study at a particular level of education. It refers to the practices, activities, and institutional arrangements within the school and classroom that are designed to implement the goals of the system (International Bureau of Education {IBE-UNESCO}, 2018). In Nigeria, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) is responsible for the intended curriculum at the basic and senior secondary levels of education. At the tertiary level, the National Universities Commission (NUC), the National Board for Technical

Education (NBTE) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) are responsible for establishing the curriculum, otherwise called minimum standards for the universities, polytechnics and colleges of education respectively. In general, many factors influence curriculum design, the most important three of the main factors being technology, a multicultural society, and classroom management. The idea of minimum standards implies that below the stipulated standards for any programme (usually monitored and evaluated during accreditation), no higher education institution will be allowed to operate, but above the minimum standards, the sky is the limit within the carrying capacity of the institution.

The Implemented Curriculum represents the portion of the intended curriculum that is actually covered by the teacher and the learners, subject to exigencies and unforeseen circumstances that usually intervene to disrupt the planned academic calendar. The UNESCO-IBE (2018) refers to implemented curriculum as the actual teaching and learning activities taking place in schools through interaction between learners and teachers as well as among learners. It consists of the practices, activities, and institutional arrangements within the school and classroom that are designed to implement the goals of the system. It has also been termed the ‘curriculum in action’ or the ‘taught curriculum’. Unarguably, it is the methodological approaches employed by the teachers that determine to a good extent, the quality of expertise in the graduate outturn.

The Attained Curriculum refers to what the learners actually acquired from their interaction with the teachers in the cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains. Attained curriculum indicates the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes that learners actually acquired as a result of teaching and learning that is authentically assessed through different approaches and/or demonstrated in practice. It is the result of what is achieved at the end of learning and teaching. The attained curriculum defines the student’s competences, academic achievement, attitudes, and belief indications. In most cases, it differs from the intended and the implemented curriculum.

### **Relevance in Higher Education Curriculum and Employability**

Curriculum design has taken a centre stage in higher education as a vehicle for meeting challenges of global competitiveness and graduate unemployment. The need to support students to live in the ever-changing global world through provision of solid, relevant preparation at the secondary and tertiary levels of education has been stressed (Harrison, 2017). Harrison

explored the reasons for graduate unemployment and found that employers expect graduates to

1. be able to add value to organisations where they are employed to work.
2. have refined and effective communication skills needed to work successfully in an organizational context with diverse stakeholders.
3. use technology easily in every aspect of work and participate in data-based economy in order to strategically advance the organization.
4. know how to work in diverse teams, foster innovation, develop viable solutions to challenges, and be able to recognize and respond to emerging opportunities.
5. be master of their academic disciplines through acquisition of preparatory experience, professional values, and connections needed to excel in their field that should be deployed for advancement of their organization.
6. to think critically about challenges and opportunities from different perspectives, as well as foster excellence in others and develop talents in the organization.

Other expectations of employers from graduates are having a positive attitude to work and possession of entrepreneurial skills, ability to demonstrate innovative approach to problem solving, creativity, collaboration and risk taking (CBI, 2011).

In the light of the needs of employers itemized in the foregoing, higher education curriculum needs to be made relevant by dropping obsolete components and replacing them with new and relevant ones in order to equip students with requisite knowledge and skills to enable them meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century workplace. A relevant curriculum should therefore be cognitively demanding and challenging to students as they adopt authentic problem solving approach to learning. Such a curriculum, according to IowaCORE (2018), possesses the following attributes:

1. Performing higher order thinking, such as predicting, hypothesizing, justifying, interpreting, synthesizing, evaluating, analyzing, and creating new understanding in order to be successful, during instruction.
2. Demonstrating good understanding and mastery of critical disciplinary concepts and skills to enable students apply important disciplinary content and not fragmented information.
3. Applying concepts and skills to situations, issues, and problems in the world

4. Making connections within and across disciplines to address the complexity of real life problems.
5. Assessing students' understanding using variety of formative assessment techniques.

Implementation of a relevant curriculum requires careful planning, preparation and actions on the part of teachers. Some of the actions to be taken by teachers include focusing on critical instructional content, developing tasks that require application of concepts and skills in a real-world context, and collaborating with others to strengthen curriculum through interdisciplinary connections. Others are designing tasks that are cognitively complex and require higher-order thinking, serving as facilitators of learning, providing descriptive feedback. Students are also required to collaborate with their peers and adults as they engage in problem-based learning, work in teams, exchange ideas as they work, and strengthen active listening skills through effective communication, as well as use technology to access, retrieve, and produce information. Harrison (2017) believes that proactive and thoughtful integration and reliance on educational technologies in curriculum and instruction, laboratories, designing of assignment. Libraries and other support services will make curriculum relevant for meeting the 21<sup>st</sup> Century needs of students and employers.

Employability is concerned with developing critical, reflective abilities, with the purpose of empowering and enhancing the learner. Pegg, Waldock, Hendy-Isaac and Lawton (2012) stressed that pedagogy for employability should focus on curriculum design, delivery and assessment; embedding employability into the core of higher education; and developing employability skills for graduates. They also suggest that making connections between students' career intentions and their learning, working, curricular and extra-curricular activities. This approach connects labour market and personal development, career management and learning to support and inform students about possibilities that exist for them. Skills auditing is commonly used for embedding employability in the curriculum, while the use of skills experience and development as a measure of employability focuses on easy connection with personnel development planning initiative together with self-awareness, reflection, and action plan. According to Harvey (2003), a pedagogy of employability should inform the entire curriculum, with each programme designed to ensure that the learning, teaching and assessment activities students engage in will enable them develop as creative, confident and articulate graduates. To achieve this, he suggests that learning, teaching and assessment should emphasize exploration, learning by doing and reflection in

authentic context; authentic work experience should contextualize learning and has influence on graduate employability, and should be integrated into course curriculum where possible; as well as building institutional culture that promotes employability courses

### **Strategies for Making Higher Education Relevant for Producing Employable Graduates**

The changes education leaders need to consider when trying to produce employable graduates at the national and regional levels are those identified and used by the California State University (CSUN) (cited in Harrison, 2017). The strategies include

1. Linking research to instructional strategies so that students work closely with their teachers to develop research skills and learn to work in diverse teams, apply research to practice: solution design, innovation, and creation.
2. Ensuring that all students understand the importance of group, as well as individual, efforts and that all students have an opportunity to learn team dynamics, including how to form teams, how to manage them, and how to measure their success.
3. Prioritizing assignment design so that students receive a better awareness of the current realities in their field, fostering students' capacities to make positive contributions early in their careers. Increase opportunities for students to work in diverse in-person and virtual project teams, fields, and disciplines.
4. Expanding and sustaining discussions between university and college administrators, faculty, employers, regional economic and community development leaders, and national and global thought leaders about talent/workforce development for the region so that deans, heads of departments, and academic staff a sense of the current work realities of their fields. This enables colleges and universities to make the curricular, assignment design, and instructional strategy changes needed to ensure an increasingly strong connection between student preparation and what employers expect from graduates.
5. Ensuring that educational technology is widely used in all aspects of the college/university experience and that students have the opportunity to add to the institution's technical capacities through their own innovative uses of technology in their coursework and projects.

## Conclusion

The paper conceptualised curriculum, curriculum relevance in higher education, graduate unemployment and trauma. It also examined how higher education curriculum can be made relevant to meet the knowledge and skill needs of graduates in order to mitigate unemployment and attendant psychological trauma of no longer needed. The need to integrate and rely on educational technologies in curriculum and instruction, laboratories, assignment design, and libraries were stressed. Specifically, linking research to instructional strategies, integration across curriculum, diversity learning, collaborative and inter-disciplinary studies, innovative instructional methods, innovative assessment techniques, and partnership with industries were identified as strategies for making higher education curriculum relevant for producing employable graduates in the global world of work. It was concluded that it is only when higher education harnesses possibilities of technology and consistently craft most profound changes in contemporary world of work, such as leadership abilities, problem solving skills, technology-driven learning, among others that graduates would be adequately prepared for success in the ever-changing world of work. This will go a long way to reduce graduate unemployment and the attendant psychological trauma of no longer needed.

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