**Employers’ Opinion Of Graduate Employees And Economic Development In Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.**

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**ABSTRACT**:

This study focuses on Employers’ opinion of graduate employees and economy development in AkwaIbom State, Nigeria. Two research questions were postulated to guide the study. The study uses descriptive survey. The population of the study comprises of all commercial business organisations in AkwaIbom State, Nigeria, totalling two hundred and seventy one (271). Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 50 business organisations and 50 employers of labour respectively. Instrument for the data was a questionnaire titled ‘Employers’ opinion of graduate employees and economy development in AkwaIbom State’ (EOGEEDQ). The instrument was subjected to criterion validation which was tested with Person Product Movement Correlation Coefficient statistic for internal constituency which gave rise to 0.72 reliability coefficient. The data collated were analysed using Simple Percentage and Mean Ratingat 2.50 decision rule respectively. The study concludes thatemployers of labour are advised to avoid negative tendenciesbetween themselves and their employees. If this happens, the productivity levels of the organization will decrease. It was recommended among others that Lawmakers should strengthen the hand of the large employers over their employees, that is to say, that enabling laws should be in place that will act as checks and balances on the employers and the employees. Defaulting employers vis-à-vis employees should be punished if they are culpable.

Keywords: Employers, Graduate Employees, Education, Economic Development.

**INTRODUCTION**

Students are those individual that have graduated in the higher education (Universities) and have not been able to acquire a tangible employment over the years to enhance their investment on education. Education as a tool for national development and self-reliance issupposed to liberate an individual with an acquired skills and knowledge to fit into the world of labour market/workforce after graduation, but the reverse is the case. Graduates are supposed to be employed based on their areas of specialization, for instance a civil engineer ought to be in a construction company where he/she can display the wealth of his/her knowledge and experience and practically contribute to durable buildings, good roads. An electrical/electronicengineerwould contribute to develop and refurbish electrical and electronic appliances to curb wastages.

Seemingly, the number of companies and organisations that would have absorbed this workforce is inadequate generally, andAkwaIbom Statewhich is our case study is not left out.As a result, graduates are mitigated from being useful to themselves and contributing to the economy of the nation. Unemployment has indeed deprived them from practicing their skills and professions based on what they studied in the University.Most of them have defected to tricycle driving, barbing, dry cleaning, kidnapping, human trafficking, to mention but few. Employers, on the other hand, have not been considerate on the views and opinions that they hold in terms of employment policy/requirement on these graduates.The perception and manner employees are viewed by their employers, have become a matter for discus in public domains. This is more so when considered from the angle of skills acquired by graduates which could make them fit into companies so as to enhance business alignment and boost market outcome. These are skills which universities are expected to inculcate through, impartation since they areexpected to provide these graduates with all round skills expected for them to be useful in market force. Universities are increasingly expected to provide highly mobile graduates who can respond to the constantly changing needs of contemporary organisations (Andrews and Higson 2008).

Every employer looks out for improved performance in their organization and business. Employers' expectation in all spheres about their employee is the ability to maximise profit with effectiveness, efficiency and equality. They wish to engage the services of educated personnel for hard work and productivity. However, observations have shown that some ‘so called’ educated ones seem to be a disappointment and frustration to their employers. According to Bouloutian (2009) those dedicated to the training work energetically to help people develop and improve skills for the purpose of optimizing performance. However, no matter how hard anyone works at training, very often, the expectation for significant behavioural change and improved performance are seldom met. Such situation leaves everyone scratching their heads seeking the answer. The setback brings forth important implications for educators and employers who will have to deal with the challenge of a shrinking output, declining productivity and disappointing workforce. The most important consideration then concerns measures to deal with the negative influence of the contemporary workforce in the labour market situation.

An Employer is an organisation, institution, government entity, agency, company, professional, services firm, non-governmental organisation, non-profit association, small business, store, etc. It is also an individual who employs or puts to work, a person who is called an employee (Heathfield, 2016). He is a person who provides work for an employee and sees that such employee works in a favourable environment and good atmosphere to enhance great productivity for the company. An employee on the other hand, is an individual employed by the employer to do a particular and or specific job. He is so employed when he had already gone through the process of selection and must have been so selected based not only on merit but also as the qualified person to do the job.

Employers' opinion is a notion, belief, consideration and or impression perceived. Simply put, these are judgements to decide upon employment criteria of an employee into an organization. According to Hamzer (1998) it is the function of all enterprises, which provides for effective use of human resources to achieve both the objectives of the enterprises and the employee. Employer’s opinion takes into cognisance the psychological basis as that part of management that deals with utilization motivation and protection of workers.

**EMPLOYERS EXPECTATIONS ON GRADUATE EMPLOYEES**

**Quality built on Communication skill -** This refers to an axle of interest concerning graduates who cannot interact smoothly and also work effectively with other colleagues in the public workplace. The condition includes lack of competency in transmitting and understanding information and in the use of ICT for the best interest of the organisation. Inability to work in a team can also be caused by lack of communication skill. Reports emanating from recent research shows that employers real concern is in terms of graduates acquisition of skills were communication, teamwork, numeracy and language skill play pivotal roles (Murray et al 2016; Collet, et al 2015 and Adebakin, et al 2015).

**Quality built into the curriculum** – students must possess and/or master the appropriate competencies in their particular field of study. This will attract employers to engage them in workforce environment. Therefore, the quality of curriculum must be improvedfor a more focused market/economy results. Employers expect to see employees apply what is learned, achieving optimum success at the impact level for the realization of goals and objectives.

**Employers view employees as a wastage and incompetent literate and will never employ or need their services when they don't fit into the skills required of them.**Arinze, (1996) states that the nature of the outputs – could be that the graduate from the educational system did not conform to the initial objective or even that the graduate finds it difficult to fit into the society. For example, somebody who studied literary subjects may not fit in very well in a computer-literate society. The graduate may not be fully employed, or it could be that they have not acquired the changes and thoughts desired by the larger society.

In other words, institutions of higher learning should improve their method of teaching in order that the graduate has better chances of demonstrating their skills in the actual workforce.

Research done by Jack and Patti (2010) reveals that executives mention terms such as ‘business contribution'; ‘business alignment', ‘business value', and ‘connection' to the business. Employers want the employees to have or obtain more training needed for developing economy by acquisition of new ideas that will better the workforce.

Training of employees by employers may be of great benefit and investment on the part of the employer (Adams, 2014; Doyle, 2013, Ebersole, 2014, Franklin & Lytle, 2015); this will increase both employers' knowledge of, and involvement in, competency-based education (CBE), and also have substantial positive effects on them as well as for higher education.

The relevance of Education and Professional training cannot be over-emphasized, in that both hold the centre of workforce and economic development. Professional training also proffers increased output to the organization/business. Training ought to be human orientated, in other words, no education, no professionals and or specialized employees at workforce

**Skill level in each competency** – This propels the degree of satisfaction of employers from the employees. Weise (2014) in the qualitative survey study emphasized that employers were asked about their satisfaction level as concomitant to those skills in people they hire. The response was only 1.89% (one person out of 53). The data indicates a high degree of satisfaction with the skill level observed in new employees. 41% of employers look for college educated workers for positions that formerly required only a high school degree. They survey revealed that employers want college-educated workforce because it leads to high work quality, productivity, communication and innovation, among other benefits.

The acquiring of some high level of skill especially in technical know-how in a specific field enhances competency and expertise in the use and manipulation of modernized technologies and also gives rise to handling technical issues in all human endeavours.

**Quality through experiential learning**- In a personal communication (2015), qualitative interviews, participants’ noted the benefits of college students experience by applying the knowledge and skills they were learning to authentic, real – life settings and situations. ‘The more real it is, the more credible it is’. By this, employers regard a modification as a reliable indication of personal ability, achievements drive and docility, adding that graduate must make a better salesman than a man who has never met the challenges of higher education (Undie, 2007).

In other words, such graduate will get the better job and receive reasonable wages not because the higher education has improved his/her skill but because the degree itself qualifies such a fellow as a responsible person. It is believed that the better-trained employee is generally flexible – easy to adapt to situations/circumstances thatpresents itself. Such fear is achieved through uses initiative in problem solving especially in difficult areas that migrate unexpectedly. They also respond to stimuli easily and are more productive than their counterparts who have not passed through the corridor of higher education, even if the higher education has not inculcated in them any specific skill per see.

This also triggers employees’ motivation to be exceptional in learning, knowing that such learning will bring about more wages/salaries than counterparts who have not attended higher education. Employers also see it as such and believe that educated ones are generally more flexible, more motivated, reliable, and are more easily adapted to changes/circumstances. Again, such categories of employee also use their initiative in solving problem related to the field quickly with little or no supervision. Unfortunately, many employ experience graduate but have gained bargaining power over wages while workers lost it {Lawrence H. Summer (2017)}.

**Work experience and a positive attitude than on class of degree when they are hiring graduates –** According to the Guardian (2006), employers expect the graduate to do their work with interest and passion hence they see it as a ground that such employee would have been motivated to get into such chosen skill by way of gaining experience. They also believed that such an employee will stand out as potential employers in future.

White House Jobs Council (2012) recommended the realignment of Higher education and training to meet workforce and students’ needs. They argued that lack of alignment between what employers need and what skills are taught and delivered have become a critical problem for competiveness. According to them, the measure will create a purposeful educational system that produces work-ready graduates, satisfied employers with access to a talented labour pool, and a vibrant economy poised for growth and success.

Furthermore, they emphasised for partnership between business organizations and educational institutions to ensure that training for students and workers meets the demands of the Labour Market (The Jobs Council, 2014). The demand will not be for mastery of a single discipline but rather fluency in multiple disciplines as increased technical knowledge will be required to address complex problem solving and decision making processes. Such demands are already being witnessed in industry (Saflund, 2007, Frey and Osborne, 2013).

The Jobs Council (2014) further postulates the development of data-driven transparency mechanisms to align Labour simply with Demand. To train the students, employee with the tools to effectively and efficiently soothe education and training with employer needs.. The National Policy on Education (2014) establishes this fact as objectives policy. Nigeria is hard-driven on digitization and provision of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) facilities to ensure that the benefit of the virtual library permeates all levels of education in Nigeria. Suffice it to say that students from the secondary and tertiary levels of education are not direct beneficiaries of this good policy, and in most instances, such gadgets provided for training in these institutions are either outdated or out-of-use whereas, those graduates are in the nearest future going to be major stakeholders and contributors to the workforce and the economy of their nation. This is a major setback because they will lack the technical know-how in computer usage. Graduates of some decades before now lack this skills and are having it hard to acquire a job in an almost robot age like we are. Institutions therefore should endeavour to develop students in ICT to enable them fit in favourably into the workforce of the century.

**Statement of the problem**

Employers’ opinion has become the backbone of any employee engagement initiative. In today's world, gaining employment all over the world is a very challenging phenomeon. Demands that are placed on employees by employers are highly influenced by performance and years of experience as prerequisites for engagement. One wonders where to begin to have ‘years of experience’. To survive in the job search market in a profitable way in the highly challenging and competitive global market economy, all the factors of existing laws, training, re-training, good pay and motivation should be managed in an efficient and a productive way. Employers should expect quality through experiential learning, placing more emphasis on work experience and positive attitude. On the other hand, many employers have been unjust to their employee, in concretes views, employees are not motivated in terms of higher wages, better working condition, protection at work environment and job security, medical and other benefits. These discomforting work condition are very prevalent and alarming in a country as Nigeria.This highlights as to why this study is carried out, poised on how the employers' views and opinions on the selection of workforce should be informed and how the perceived ideologies should be handled to enhance efficiency, developing the employee in terms of training on new ideas and skills to precipitate competency.

**Research Questions**

1. What are the problems encounters by the employers in the course of managing the graduate employees?
2. What are the employers’ strategies for improvement in the management of the graduate employees?

**Method**

The study uses descriptive survey for the study. The population of the study comprises of all commercial business organisations in AkwaIbom State, Nigeria, totalling two hundred and seventy one (271).**Source**: Nigeria Directory/AkwaIbom State/Uyo L.G.A. Multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 50 business organisations and 50 employers of labour respectively. Instrument for the data was a questionnaire titled ‘Employers’ opinion of graduate employees and economy development in AkwaIbom State’ (EOGEEDQ). The instrument was subjected to criterion validation which was tested with Person Product Movement Correlation Coefficient statistic for internal constituency which gave rise to 0.72 reliability coefficient. The items were 17, 10 elicit information on the employers cost of managing graduate employees and 7 elicit information on the employers strategies for improvement in the management of graduate employees for enhancing economy development. The data collated were analysed using Simple Percentage and Mean Rating with 2.50 decision rule respectively

**Result of the Findings**

**Table 1**:Simple Percentage and Mean Rating of Employers cost of managing the graduate Employees in AkwaIbom State, Nigeria

No of respondents = 50

S/N Agree Mean Disagree

1. Lack of competent graduates 47(94%) 4.7 3(6%)
2. Lack of technical know-how 35(70%) 3.5 15(30%)
3. Poor communication gap 46(92%) 4.6 8(8%)
4. Recruitment of non-skilled graduates 45(90%) 4.5 5(10%)
5. Graduate ill-attitude to work 48(96%) 4.8 2(4%)
6. Poor working environment 30(60%) 3.0 20(40%)
7. Poor performance in the work done 45(90%) 4.5 5(10%)
8. Too much/excessive salary to pay 25(50%) 2.5 25(50%)
9. Lack of quality education 35(70%) 3.5 15(30%)
10. Lack of computer experiences 35(70%) 3.5 15(30%)

Grand Mean 3.9

The data as shown in table 1 indicates all items positive responses with its grand mean score of 3.9 above the decision rule of 2.50. This means that there is a strong retort from the respondents on the employers cost of managing the graduate employees in AkwaIbom State, Nigeria.

**Table 2**:Simple Percentage and Mean Rating of Employers strategies for improvement in managing the graduate Employees in AkwaIbom State, Nigeria

No of respondents = 50

S/N Agree Mean Disagree

11. Regular training/re-training 30(60%) 4.3 20(40%)

12. Increment of the salaries for better working

Condition 30(60%) 4.3 20(40%)

13. Emphasis on quality communication and

good rapport among both parties 45(90%) 6.4 5(10%)

14. Giving the employees the opportunity

of using their initiatives at times 46(92%) 6.6 4(8%)

15. Counselling them on a good disposal of attitude 50(100%) 7.2 Nil(%)

16. Constant partnership with educational

institutions for better education that meets

the demands of labour market 45(%) 6.4 5(10%)

17. Provide financial assistance 28(56%) 4.0 22(44%)

Grand Mean 5.6

Data shown in table 2 indicates that all items denote positive responses. The grand mean of 5.6 is greater than the mean decision rule of 2.50. This shows a tough positive agreement on employers' strategies for improvement of the graduate employees to enhance economy development.

**Discussion of Findings**

The finding of the study correlates with the study conducted by the Group Training Association of Victoria (2005) for learning about employer attitude of student performance. That study found that employers were mostly ambivalent about grades, fairly dismissive about the usefulness of grades for employment selection purposes. Some comments made by these survey participants include, "I don't care, what I want is for them to turn up, work well, and be passionate" and "Employers look for attitude, commitment and integrity – not grades".

The finding also agrees with the National Policy on Education(2014), section 2(13c), stating: ‘inculcate values and raise morally upright individuals capable of independent thinking, and who appreciate the dignity of labour’, inter-alia section 1(6e), provides for ‘the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competences as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society’.

The study agrees with Roos(2014), who opined that in an educational context, there is a need for science and technology disciplines and business education to bridge the gap to deliver the graduates demanded by today’s knowledge intensive industries

The finding agrees with that of Igunnu (2006), who concludes that the employers' should offer assistance financially when the need arises. Since they look out for competent personnel and so on, effort should be made to pay according to each specialist' worth and provide a ground for the employees more training and support them in the work experiences challenges.Employees should invest what they have to develop and utilize the provisions of their career as a person (entrepreneur) managing his or her small-scale business. The successful career will be built on maintaining flexibility and keeping skills and knowledge up to date.

**CONCLUSION**

Despite the pros and cons of the employers, this paper concludes that there are still good number of employers who are perfect in its dealing with the employees and its management generally. Those employers that had not attain to perfect, should endeavour to make a move.On the whole, employers of labour are advised to avoid negative tendencies between themselves and their employees. If this happens, the productivity levels of the organization will decrease. The employees are the ones who have direct contact with the open market and go the extra mile to be helpful. When they are happy, a good relationship between them and the customer is created and maintained. When employees are unhappy often they will direct their unhappiness towards the end users. To survive and grow in the twenty-first century, educational bodies must develop and appropriate human and technical skills to motivate and inspire all those involved in generating employment and those who are employed for services.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Lawmakers should strengthen the hand of the large employers over their employees, that is to say, that enabling laws should be in place that will act as checks and balances on the employers and the employees. Defaulting employers vis-à-vis employees should be punished if they are culpable.

2. Balancing the power of employers and employees is very important to the economy. Employers should be encouraged to share their profit with their employees and give chance for corporate governance. The eagerness they displayed in searching for competent, experienced and skilled graduates should be matched with a commensurate fair pay as well. Let them display a three-pod stand: more labour put, more market, and then more wages earned.

3. Employers should always have trust in the capabilities and competence of their workforce so as to enhance easy flow in working environment and decision making.

4. Employers would like to have a voice in identifying what skills and competencies are needed by their workforce and believe it is in an institution best interest to seek to out their input.

5. They should maintain the spirit of honesty, good reputation, and keep developing their skills and abilities that are of high demand; maintain competence and expertise in their field and keep their options open by hoping for the best.

6. Educational planners should structure and strategize curriculum/course contents and its relationship with needed skills that forms part of today's different and constantly evolving specialities to fit in graduates into the current global/economic expectations in terms of employment.

7. Employers of labour should not capitalize wholly on years of experience before accepting an employee rather they should give preference to them to start based on their abilities and capabilities enlisted on the curriculum vitae. As the saying goes ‘Rome was not built in a day’ as she or he engages in the job, the competence will manifest in gradual process.

8.Employ people who are better than you are, not necessarily ‘perfection’ because there is no     perfection, but people that will be so inquisitive to ask question, notice errors and work     without hang about and if you pay well it is easy to recruit more high intelligent people.

9. Be open to your potential employee when interviewing them, be realistic, be honest to let      them know the stress and benefits attached to the job so as to prepare their minds towards      the challenges and understands what they are to get into as they take the job.

10. Train employee on how to key into the system and by so doing, make sure you already       have educated trainer that the new employee can rely on in terms of asking questions       whenever necessary. Let them know of the company culture and how to operate system        therein. If possible, send the new employee to a training course to learn more on        technical knowhow since it will need a little time and effort for such a new person to pick        up to speed as needed.

11.  Set a clear goal but narrating what you expect from your employee. Explain clearly what        you want to accomplish in your company to the employees. Hit the nail on the head at        all times, don’t use figurative or ambiguous language and expect your employee to        decode, understand and apply. For example you may let them know that        clients/customers e-mail are to be responded within an hour; don’t say you expect a        prompt response to our client, they may not understand what you really mean. You       need to let them know what you are judging them on.

12. If you need a financial target, output or productivity target or anything that needs to be       improved upon, let your employee know so that they will put up a strategy to perform       higher to ensure goals are achieved.

13.  Be fair and not show favouritism, judge each employee based on work output and         performance. If any of them reaches the goal reward them accordingly but do pull back a        promise bonus.Treat them the way you would have loved to be treated by your        employer.

14.  If an employee performs or acts in a positive way to the customer or client, praise them        let them know you are grateful and if the reverse is the case let them know in a polite or        private way that they have not done well and to avoid such mistake why may some         other time jeopardize the company’s image. In doing so, they will know the pros and         cons or the dos and don’ts of the company. They will learn to act positive and or redress.

15.  Give the employee free hands to do their jobs by allowing them to set their goals by the        way they are familiar with or think it will work. Don’t say, we have not followed such        procedure before, but allow them to use their initiative when they ask for it. If any of        them ask for another training to solve a particular problem arrange for it if need be, don’t        look at the cost effect or time wastage for it is for the company’s benefit to achieve        greater performance. They may know their jobs better than you (employer).

16.  Listen to their ideas, don’t maltreat them as if they cannot work somewhere else. It is a        privilege you employed them so treat them better, talk with them andget their feedbacks.        Don’t see them as robots but co-workers and co-partners in thecompany.

17.  As the adage goes ‘a lizard fell from the Iroko tree and nobody praises him. He looked to        the right and left, nodded his head and said if nobody praises me, I will praise myself’ so        as an employer don’t expect your employees praise but you need to commend them for a        job well done. At timeswell done!Trigger more than a bonus (but note that you give        bonus where necessary). Always say, my dear Vicky/Paul, I am happy to have you as a        staff, thanks so much. It activates the hormones for more action. In other way, if there is        an error, as an employer, take the responsibility for the bad and give credit for the        good,that is the best way to achieved, respect and exude confidence.

18. Institutions of learning must be social architects who can work across levels and functions       of the strata, continuously improving the educational process and fostering an atmosphere      favourable to innovation, critical thinking, communication skills, problem-solving      strategy, risk-taking, self-directed teamwork, commitment, quality and self-improvement.

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