

How do Students Perceive their Employability Readiness: The Case of Architecture Students

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Abstract—There are often claims that graduates are not employable and some scholars have posited that this is the major cause of the high rate of unemployment in many countries. There are indications in literature of the parameters by which employability can be measured. These measures of employability have been investigated from the point of view of employers and they represent the areas employers would use as criteria for selection of prospective employees. The question however is: how do the students perceive their preparedness for the workforce, in terms of their employability readiness? This is the question that this paper seeks to address in a survey of architecture students in Nigeria. Architecture students are investigated because it has often been alleged that formal education does not prepare persons in this course of study sufficiently for the world of work. The results suggest areas that the students are not so confident of their preparedness. Recommendations are made for the training of architects to enhance their employability.

Keywords—Architecture Students, Employability, Nigeria, Perception of employability

I. INTRODUCTION

Higher education is often seen as a stepping stone to a good job. It has however often been alleged that the University does not produce job-ready graduates. Even with courses that are often considered as vocational, like architecture, employers still note that they have to re-train fresh graduates to make them fit for practice. Brown et al. [1] noted that a degree confers little positional advantage in the job market. This suggests the relevance of other skills apart from the technical skills, which the degree attests to. Several studies on employability are often based on data from the point of view of employers. Very few studies exist that considers the point of view of the students. In this study therefore, an attempt is made to fill this gap by investigating the perception of employability readiness of students of architecture. Architecture presents an interesting context as the course is often hands-on, with students challenged with projects and assignments, which are simulations of real industry projects. Although anecdotal evidence suggests that employers are often satisfied with the technical skills of the students, there are other skills that are important to stand out as the most likely candidate for a job.

Employability, according to Yorke [2] is “a set of achievements, skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” [2].

The aim of this study is to investigate the perception of employability-readiness of architecture students. A study of this nature is important as it provides insight into the areas that students do not feel competent to face the job market. These are areas that institutions may assume they have handled in the curriculum, but may not have been adequately addressed.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Although employability is a concept which came into use several years ago, there has been an increasing interest in graduate employability of recent. One of the reasons for this is need to make graduates who are meant to be skilled in particular areas more relevant to real life practice. The studies in this area have identified skills, which may not necessarily be restricted to particular professions, which promote graduate employability. These skills were broadly subdivided into core skills; key skills; common skills; transferable skills; essential skills; functional skills; skills for life; generic skills and enterprise skills. In recent literature however, employability skills have been investigated under subsections such as information technology proficiency, oral and written communication, number skills, and technical competency, among others [3].

To the employer graduates who are proactive are more sought after [4]. These scholars opine that today’s employer look out for skills such as critical thinking, ability to work in teams, and proficiency in communication, when they employ fresh graduates. In fact, critical thinking is believed to foster innovation [5, 6]. Other aspects that these employers look out for include ability to adapt to workplace culture, This is probably why the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education (NIACE) in 1982 suggested that employability may be more of a social construct with diverse aspects.

Rothwell and Arnold [7] identified seven factors that impact on students' employability skills. These include academic performance, confidence, ambition, and perception of student's university brand. Other factors are reputation of university, status of field of study and student's awareness of opportunities in the labour market.

Employability goes beyond skills that enable a graduate gain employment after graduation [2]. Hillage and Pollard [8] observed that it also encompasses skills that make it possible for a person to move easily within the labour market as well as make a success of a particular job. Although Brown, Hesketh, and William [1] criticised this view, noting that the local, national and international labour markets do matter, one would however not that within the same country or industry, some graduate tend to be more employable than others.

Employers are said to value the skills which makes one applicant appeal more as the most likely candidate than other [9]. These skills include those are technical and those that are more or less relational. The technical skills include knowledge of the business, problem solving, ICT knowledge, literacy and numeracy skills relevant to the post, while the relational skills include team working, as well as good interpersonal and communication skills. In addition however, employers also look out for self-management, which is evident in motivation, commitment and tenacity displayed by a job candidate. It also entails ability not just to use own initiative but also to follow instructions. To develop these skills, UKCES[9] suggest that university students should be made to engage in extra-curricular as well as internship programmes.

Universities all over the world always strive to demonstrate that their graduates can fit into the job market. Educators therefore strive to get the message across that learning enhances life chances in a variety of ways, it is undeniable that pressure from government and regulators, as well as fee-paying students and their families, requires increased clarity about the ways in which the curriculum helps develop the skills and competencies needed in the world of work.

This is in the light of the fact that employability is about much more than simply getting a job after one finishes studies. It is about achievements, understanding and personal attributes. It is also about the students' self-image. These are attributes that it would take more than lecture to develop.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

For the purpose of this study, questionnaires were administered to 154 students of architecture in Covenant University, a University in Nigeria. Students at the final undergraduate year and the Masters students were sampled in the study. Self-administered questionnaires were used in obtaining the data. Data was obtained on the respondents' profiles, their view on their overall preparedness for the job market and their views on their levels of employability skills

already acquired. This was done on a scale of 1 to 5, where "1" represented "Not prepared at all", while 5 represented "Highly prepared".

TABLE I. RESPONDENTS' PROFILE

Respondents' profiles	Categories	Percentage (%)
Sex of respondents	Male	64.4
	Female	35.6
Ages of respondents	14-16yrs	1.0
	17-19yrs	30.6
	20-21yrs	50.3
	above 21yrs	18.1
Extent to which students perceived their training has prepared them for the job market	Not prepared at all	2.6
	To a little extent	20.7
	To some extent	51.8
	To a large extent	24.9
Students' level of confidence that they will be employed to practice architecture on graduation	Not confident at all	3.1
	Little confident	7.3
	Somewhat Confident	17.3
	Confident	41.9
	Highly confident	30.4

Of the number of questionnaire administered, 115 were returned and usable. This represented a response rate of 74.7% (Table I). Most of the respondents were male (64.4%), with about half aged between 20 and 21 years. About three-quarter (76.7%) of the students believed that their study has prepared them to some or a large extent for the job market. Similarly, 72.3% of the students are confident that they will be employed to practice architecture on graduation.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results in Table II show that the students believe that they are best prepared for teamwork and self-motivation. Their problem-solving, creativity, personal organisation and decision-making skills also appear to be rated high. However, the students do not appear to be very comfortable with the levels of leadership, project management and management skills. It is even more surprising that the students perceived least preparedness on subject knowledge or technical skills related to architecture. It appears the students still feel there is a lot more to be learnt. A closer look at the data however show that most of the students who rated their preparedness in terms of technical skill low were those at the final undergraduate level. This is probably as a result of the curriculum that limited the more of the practice-focused courses to the postgraduate levels.

It is however interesting to note that the teamwork skill of the students was perceived as the most developed skill.

The curriculum of the school also needs to be reviewed to cater more for the development of leadership, entrepreneurial and management skills.

TABLE II. RANKING OF STUDENTS' PERCEIVED PREPAREDNESS FOR THE JOB-MARKET

Employability skills	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teamwork	4.1959	.87734
Self-motivation	4.1134	.95902
Problem solving	4.0876	.88015
Creativity	4.0777	.93495
Personal organization	4.0773	.86928
Decision-making	4.0155	.86889
Ability to design and conduct investigation	3.9741	.89230
Oral communication	3.9536	1.03459
Computer literacy, advanced IT/software skills	3.9534	.92585
Numerical reasoning	3.9053	.94364
Critical thinking	3.9021	1.03598
Written communication	3.8953	.97847
Information Technology	3.8705	.98890
Entrepreneurial skills	3.8394	1.05084
Leadership skills	3.8238	1.01553
Project Management	3.8144	1.06601
Management skills	3.8031	.96425
Subject Knowledge/Technical Skills	3.7098	1.01999

V. CONCLUSION

The aim of this study is to investigate the perceived preparedness of students of architecture for the job market. The results suggest areas that areas of management and entrepreneurship are areas that the architecture schools should address. A major limitation of this study is that data was collected from only one institution. In addition, further study may use objective measures of the preparedness of the students, instead of perception adopted in this study. Technical skill development should also be an area of focus.

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