

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS, WORK ATTITUDE AND JOB COMMITMENT: PERCEPTION OF NIGERIAN YOUTHS

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Abstract

The major objective of this study was to examine the perception of undergraduate youths as to whether it was employability skills or attitude that had a greater effect on employees' job commitment in Nigeria. This would enable the management of Nigerian Universities to develop better training policies, and the youths to prepare for the competitive work environment upon graduation. 262 students in their third year from three universities in the north and south regions of Nigeria were sampled through proportionate stratified random sampling. Employing descriptive statistics and regression methods, data were analyzed. Among others, the study found that Nigerian youths perceived that employability skills such as vocational and technical skills had a more critical influence on job commitment than attitude, with a beta of .297, $p < 0.01$. Therefore, aside from the Entrepreneurial Development Program in our universities and other tertiary educational institutions, the Management of Nigerian universities should maintain wider industrial linkages with private training firms to give vocational and professional training to the undergraduates. On their part, the students should acquire employability skills, outside their universities, during holidays, or by way of an internship. This would give them self-confidence when approaching the competitive job market.

Keywords: employability skills, attitude, job commitment.

1.0 Introduction

Globally, governments have realized the vital role entrepreneurs play in job creation through creativity, innovation and inventions; and this resulted from employability skills acquired in schools and other training centres. In today's workforce, there are essential skills that make for employee's high performance at work, and these must be acquired and mastered before first entry into work environment. This is one way to avoid the avalanche of youth unemployment in Nigeria and Africa at large. In Oxford English Dictionary's simple definition, skill is doing something well in a certain field, while attitude implies one's view and response towards something, and job commitment is one's dedication and engagement towards a job. Employability skills are skills needed to gain employment and progress within an organization (Messum, Wilkes & Jackson, 2015). Skills make for competitiveness and are floodgates of good employment opportunities for individuals. For the industrialist, skill leads to high productivity which invariably leads to positive gross domestic product (GDP) of a nation. It is arguable that an employee with high skill level but poor work attitude could have poor work performance. In recent time, there are complaints from employers of labour of the mismatch between the acquired skills and job performance (D'souza & Poojary, 2018), and work attitude and job commitment of graduates (Osman & Galang, 2011). One would have thought that the graduate' technical and/or vocational skills would correlate with his/her job commitment, and that positive attitude to work should have been acquired while in school since most tertiary educational institutions (Nigerian Universities inclusive) award degrees based on character and learning. On the part of the employees, some unemployed graduates with skills that obviate employment have recant courage; others become fickle or vacillating rather than go to learn vogue finesse. The problem could be attributable to warped educational foundation, student's inability to explore employability skills outside the classroom setting and inadequate teaching and learning resources, with exception to altruistic teachers. Various researches have investigated the influence of skill acquisition on job performance of employees (Dasmani, 2011; Denis, Ariyaratne & Perera, 2016; Ibru, 2009; Obasan, 2014; Pihie et al., 2014). Few others have examined the impact of work attitude on employee's job commitment (D'souza & Poojary, 2018; Malakshah, 2017). This study intends to investigate the individual and joint effect of employability skills and work attitude on job commitment of Nigerian youths, on the side of the youths themselves. Which of the skills or attitude do they perceive will impact employee's job commitment?

2.0 Literature Review

The study is underpinned to the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen 1991) and Social Exchange Theory (Blau 1964). Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) postulated that human relationships are formed through subjective cost-

benefit analysis. That is, employees come into the work environment to exchange their skills for money. As such, there are costs and benefits of such social relationship. Therefore, it could be argued that employer's investment on the employee should be reciprocated with increased job commitment from the employee. Similarly, Ajzen (1991) stated that attitude produces behavioural intention. That is, one's behaviour and intention could be inferred from his/her attitude. Therefore, negative work attitude could give rise to poor job commitment.

The study of Abas-Mastura, Imam and Osman (2013) has confirmed that acquired employability skills affect employee's job performance level; while skills drive competitiveness and become corner-stones for high productivity (Murgor, 2013). Literature has provided evidence that the vital entrepreneurial skills needed for entrepreneur's business performance included: technical, financial, social, computer, and vocational. However, technical, vocational and social were critical skills found to correlate with entrepreneur's performance (Ekpe, Mat & Adelaiye, 2017). Therefore, this study focused on these skills.

Vocational Skills: Apart from capital, skill training was also found to have positive effect on enterprise start-up and growth (Ekpe, Mat & Adelaiye, 2017). This is one of the reasons many world leaders have turned to entrepreneurial education for employment generation especially among youths. Therefore, entrepreneurs could be made through skill acquisition programs, not only born. Aside Dasmani (2011), numerous studies found positive correlation between vocational skill acquisition and entrepreneurial opportunities (e.g. Salman, 2009; Stohmeyer, 2007). For example, skill acquisition had positive impact on enterprise formation in Nigeria (Ibru, 2009). Also, vocational training had significant positive effect on new business formation in France and Germany respectively (Branan, 2008, Stohmeyer, 2007). By corollary, vocational skill acquisition could correlate with employee's job commitment. As such, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H₁: A positive relationship exists between vocational skill and employee's job commitment.

Social Skills: The research of Obasan (2014) provided empirical evidence that effective communication correlated positively with employee's development. In other words, social skills of their supervisor helped them to develop entrepreneurial spirit. By extension, it could be argued that acquiring social skills at school could help new entrant into workforce relate well with his/her colleagues, thereby leading to job commitment. Also, perceived social environment positively related with students' entrepreneurial intentions in

China (Yun & Yuan-qiong, 2010). As such, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H₂: A positive relationship exists between social skill and employee's job commitment.

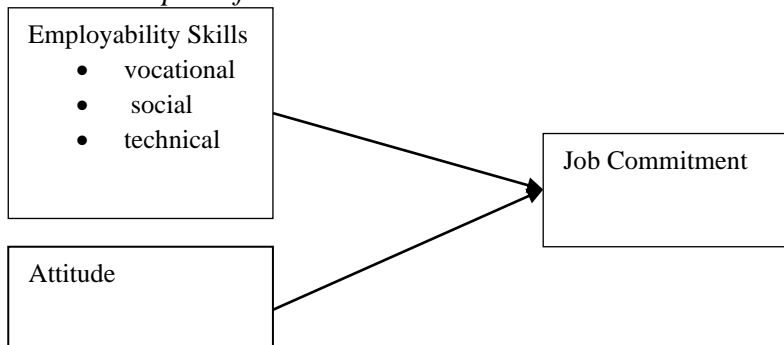
Technical skills: High technical academic performance was found to positively influence future leadership role among Malaysian students (Ekpe & Mat, 2016). In the same vein, technical skill acquisition among Nigerian students could lead to positive influence on their job commitment, and then performance. Also, skill acquisition and competence positively related with employee's task performance (Abas-Mastura, Imam & Osman, 2013). Again, the work of Murgor (2013) indicated that ability to use numerical data, among other skills, were crucial in the job market. As such, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H₃: A positive relationship exists between technical skill and employee's job commitment.

Attitude: Employee's motivation centres on the individual employee because what motivates an individual may be different from what motivates another. This was the central focus of the classical authors such as Ajzen (1991) and Weirich, Cannice and Koontz (2008). Therefore, for employability skills to translate to job commitment depends on the employee's attitude to work. If he/she has positive attitude to work and good morals, then his/her skill would lead to high job performance, and vice versa for poor or negative attitude to work (Udida et al., 2012). Again, in recent studies, attitude and behavioural intentions were positively related (Emaikwu, 2011; Onuoha et al. 2013). D'souza and Poojary (2018) argued that employee's positive attitude leads to job satisfaction which in turn leads to organizational commitment, while Lee and Chen (2013) postulated that employee's negative attitude leads to poor job performance. The opinion of Kuman (2011) was that negative attitude to work produces poor job satisfaction. As such, the following hypothesis is put forward:

H₄: A positive relationship exists between attitude and employee's job commitment.

The Conceptual Framework of the study is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

(Source: Literature Review, 2021)

Among the variables of employability skills mostly measured by previous studies were vocational, social and technical which were found to correlate with job performance (Ekpe et al., 2017; Lee & Chen, 2013). Attitude was also found to correlate with job commitment (Abas-Mastura et al, 2013).

3.0 Methods

The study adopted cross-sectional and structured questionnaires to solicit responses from the unit of analysis (students). The views of 262 third-year male and female students from three universities in the north and south regions of Nigeria during 2020/2021 academic session were sampled through proportionate stratified random sampling method. Sample members were selected from the list of registered 300 level students, using probability sampling. They were identified during Entrepreneurial Development Program class which is compulsory for all such students in all Nigerian universities. Total enumeration was adopted on the sample size and questionnaires distributed to students of Anchor University Lagos, Edwin Clarke University, Delta State and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi. 120 questionnaires were returned which gave 46% response rate (< 30%: Sekaran, 2001). However, after data cleaning, data for 104 respondents were used for the analyses. Descriptive statistics and regression method were used to analyze the data.

Employability skill was operationally defined as vocational skill, social skill and technical skill in line with Dasmani (2011), Obasan (2014) and Abas-Mastura, Imam and Osman (2013). Job commitment was defined as job knowledge, zeal, quality and quantity of work, and cooperation with colleagues in line with Murgor (2013). All measures were tapped on 4-point Likert scale: (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) agree, and (4) strongly agree.

4.0 Results and Findings

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

The respondents' demographics were handled through descriptive (frequency) statistics, as depicted in Table 1. From the table, female students (52%) constituted the majority of students in Nigerian universities at the period under study. Majority of the students (41%) were within 20-30 years age bracket. The results indicated that many young people in Nigeria receive university education and that female education has received greater attention in recent times.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Category	Age	N	%	Category	Gender	N	%
	Less than 20	37	36		Male	50	48
	20-30	43	41		Female	54	52
	31 and above	24	23				
Total		104	100			104	100

4.2 Data Cleaning

Data cleaning was performed on the data. Missing data was checked through frequency statistics, and there was no missing data. Outliers was checked through Mahalanobis statistics by comparing D^2 (Mahalanobis distance) with critical X^2 (Chi-square table) value of 52 items at error margin of $p = 0.001$ (Hair et al., 2010:66) which was 89.27. There was no respondent with $X^2 > 89.27$; hence, there was no outlier. Non-normal data was checked through Z-score statistics (kurtosis and skewness) which was compared with table Z-score value at 5% error margin (1.96). There was no respondent with Z-score value above +1.96 or below -1.96; hence, the data was normal. Multicollinearity was checked through Tolerance statistics and Variance Inflationary Factor. For all, Tolerance was > 0.10 (ranged from 0.85 to 0.88) and VIF was < 10 (ranged from 1.14 to 1.18). Independence of error term was checked through Durbin-Watson regression output. The acceptable range is from 1.50 to 2.50. For this study, independence of error term was 2.07.

4.3 Goodness of Measures

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was carried out, the result of which indicated that independent variable (employability skill) collapsed into three components (i) Vocational Skill (Training gave me the required job skill), (ii) Social Skill (I interact with people so I can identify their needs), (iii) Technical Skill (I have acquired expert knowledge in my career). Total variance expected (TVE) was 71.296, KMO was 0.662, Barlett test of sphericity was 754.662 and Significance level was 0.000. The second independent variable collapsed into one component: attitude (I hate a boss who is too religious) with TVE as 54.542, KMO as 0.595, Barlett test of sphericity as 75.566 and Significance level as 0.000. The dependent variable collapsed into one component: Job Commitment (Skill acquisition will help

me in better job commitment) with TVE as 68.383, KMO as 0.750, Barlett test of sphericity as 265.582 and Significance level as 0.000. These are shown in Tables 2, 3 and 4 under Appendix.

4.4 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

After the EFA, the factors were transformed into variables through mean derivation which became the variables for subsequent analyses. For reliability, Cronbach's alpha for required skill was .815, for social interaction .846, for expert knowledge .834 and for boss hatred .689. Alpha for the dependent variable, job commitment, was .844. This is presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Variables' Descriptive Statistics (M, SD) and Reliability

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach' Alpha	No. items after EFA	Sample size (N)
Required/voc. skill	2.91	3.40	.815	5	104
Social interaction	3.25	2.28	.846	4	104
Expert/tech. knowl.	3.11	2.57	.834	4	104
Hate boss/attitude	2.51	2.42	.689	3	104
Job commitment	3.43	2.43	.844	5	104

The results of the descriptive statistics indicated that youths perceived that social interaction (M=3.25, SD=2.28) and expert knowledge (M=3.11, SD=2.57), have greater impact on job commitment (M=3.43, SD=2.43) in Nigeria.

4.5 Test of Hypotheses

Table 6: Result of Multiple Regressions on Job Commitment

Variable	Beta	Hypothesis
Indep. Var.:		
VocSkill	.380****	H1: Supported
SocSkill	-.026	H2: Refuted
TechSkill	-.297***	H3: Supported
Attitude	.216**	H4: Supported
R Square	.572****	
Adjusted R Square	.494	
R Square Change	.572	
F Value	7.275	
Sig. F Change	.000****	

Note: ****p<.001; ***p<.01; **p<.05; *p<.10

DV = JCom. (job commitment). IV: VocSkill (vocational skill), SocSkill (social skill), TechSkill (technical skill), Attitude

Table 6 (multiple regression) indicated that, among the employability skill variables, Nigerian youths perceived that vocational skill, social skill and technical skill generally had significant positive effect on job commitment,

with R-square .572. In this case, the predictor variables explained 57.2% of the variance in job commitment. Generally, the regression model was significant (R-square change = .572, $p < .000$, F change = 7.275, Sig. F change = .000). However, from the individual coefficients, Nigerian youths perceived that employability skill such as vocational skill (beta = .380, $p < .000$) and technical skill (beta = -.297, $p < .01$) had the more critical influence on job commitment. Attitude (beta = .216, $p < .05$) also had significant positive effect on job commitment but lower than employability skills. Individually, social skill was insignificant. Therefore, hypotheses 1, 3 and 4 were supported.

5.0 Discussion

Nigerian youths perceived that employability skills (vocational skill, social skill and technical skill) and attitude generally have significant positive effect on job commitment. However, the individual coefficients proved that vocational and technical skills were more significant than attitude. It goes to prove that these skills have direct impact on output than attitude. Aside positive attitude to work, moral character is needed to help an employee retain his/her job and progress in it. This study supported the work of D'souza and Poojary (2018), and Lee and Chen (2013) who discovered that organizational commitment resulted from employee's attitude and this led to job satisfaction. Again, the result is in line with Murgor (2013) who found positive effect of technical and vocational skills on job engagement in Kenya. However, this study refuted the work of Abas-Mastura, Imam and Osman (2013) who found positive attitude as topmost preferred soft skills for job performance because technical skills can always be taught. Attitude is an inbuilt, addicted character that is difficult to change in adults and there are people who have skills, wealth and certificates but lack good moral character which is valuable for holistic success in life.

6.0 Conclusion

This study reported that the overall model of employability skills, attitude and job commitment was significant. This indicated that these variables are jointly needed to achieve employee's job commitment. Vocational skill and technical skills had significant effect on job commitment more than attitude. It was also interesting to discover that social skill alone was not significant with job commitment. This is expected because an employee who is sociable at workplace without the requisite employability skills cannot record high job commitment and performance. The research has unveiled the necessary employability skills that youths should acquire while in school in order to secure good employment upon graduation. Positive attitude to work and good morals are also vital to achieve success in a work environment. Aside the Entrepreneurial Development Program in our universities and other tertiary educational institutions, the Nigerian universities' Management should

maintain wider industrial linkages in terms of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with private training firms (ICAN, COREN, and ICT) to establish their presence in the universities so as to give vocational and professional training to the undergraduates. The students should also acquire such skills, outside their universities, during holidays or by way of internship. This would give them self confidence during their entry into the competitive job market.

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Appendices

Table 2: Exploratory Factor Analysis

Items	Comp. 1	Comp. 2	Comp. 3	Comp. 4	Comp. 5	Comp. 6
IV 1						
Q7	.790					
Q6	.789					
Q5	.759					
Q9	.702				.306	
Q8	.700					
Q23		.862				
Q22		.778		.322		
Q21		.771				
Q24		.768				
Q1			.867			
Q2			.829			
Q3			.820			
Q4			.732			
Q17				.838		
Q16				.796		
Q13					.849	
Q12					.601	.571
Q11						.859

Rotation converged in 6 iterations. Comp.1=voc. skill, comp.2=social skill, comp.3=tech. skill

Table 3: Exploratory Factor Analysis

Items	Comp. 1	Comp. 2
IV 2		
Q39	.820	
Q38	.795	
Q31	.719	
Q40		.811
Q37		.798

Rotation converged in 3 iterations. Comp.1=attitude.
 Note: A comp. must load at least 3 items

Table 4: Exploratory Factor Analysis

Items	Comp. 1	Comp. 2
DV		
Q50	.847	
Q51	.835	
Q52	.789	
Q49	.748	
Q45	.701	
Q43		.905
Q44		.882

Rotation converged in 3 iterations. Comp.1=job com.
 Note: A comp. must load at least 3 items.