Recruitment of Distance Learning Graduates: Survey of Labour Market Employers' Readiness in Niger State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated the readiness of employers of labour toward distance learning graduates in Niger State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research approach was adopted and employers of labour in both private and public sectors within the study area constituted the sample. Four research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. A 22-item researchers' developed questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection. The instrument was considered suitable after undergoing experts' validation and reliability checks. Data gathered were analyzed in which Mean and Standard Deviation was used to provide answers to the four research questions while t-test statistics were used to test the two hypotheses. Findings revealed that employers of labour are ready to offer distance learning graduates job opportunities in their organizations. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that individuals willing to attend distance learning institutes but are scared because of the fear of not being able to secure job should be sensitized and made aware that employers of labour consider graduates of such institutes employable and are ready to offer them jobs in their organizations.

Keywords
Distance learning, Employers of labour, Readiness, Graduates.

INTRODUCTION

Education plays a significant and important role in national development. All countries of the world seemed to have accepted the tremendously compelling arguments to make education the cornerstone of national development. The arguments include: the vital role education plays in economic and technological development; education of the citizenry to remove illiteracy and poverty; developing a

culturally and socially tolerant people who exercise ethical and moral considerations in national and local affairs, with a community spirit (Jegede, 2016).

Education involves the development of human behaviour through the process of teaching and learning and it can be seen as the total development of the individual through acceptable methods and techniques according to his abilities and interests to meet up with the needs of the society and for the individual to take his rightful place and contribute equally to the enhancement of the society (Amaeleet al. 2011). Educational Technology is a wide field. According to Bates (2005), educational technology is the application of the scientific process to man's learning conditions and the psychology of learning to practical teaching problems. In other words, educational technology is a study and ethical practice for facilitating learning and improving performance by creating, using and managing appropriate technological processes and resources. However, with the advent of education technology, Distance education is made possible and a lot easier.

Distance learning, in particular, refers to situations where learners are physically separated from the educational provider, communicating in writing (using letter-mail, email, fax or computer referencing), verbally (by telephone, audio conferencing), or in face-to-face tutorial sessions (Common Wealth of Learning, 2003). Moreover, the relationship between higher education and the labour market has traditionally been a closely corresponding one, although in sometimes loose and intangible ways (Johnson, 2003). Higher Education has traditionally helped to regulate the flow of skilled, professional and managerial workers. Furthermore, this relationship was marked by a relatively stable flow of highly qualified young people into well-paid and rewarding jobs. Employers are also looking for general job skills which are sometimes called employability skills, soft skills foundational skills, work-readiness skills, or job-readiness skills. Some studies have shown that employment does not hinge on the possession of a degree acquired through whatever means. Rather employers look for characteristics such as personal attributes such as motivation and initiative, experience, professional certifications, attendance, computer literacy, and administration skills (Thomas &Nicita, 2003). Employability skills allow you to: communicate with co-workers, solve problems, understand your role within the team, make responsible choices, and take charge of your own career, Personal qualities, habits, and attitudes influence how you interact with others. Employers value employability skills because they are linked to how you get along with co-workers and customers, your job performance, and your career success. Employers' readiness can be defined as the extent to which an employer of labour is perceived the employee to possess the attitudes and attributes that make them prepared or ready for success in the work environment (Caballero & Walker, 2010).

The extent to which employers are ready to offer the job to ODL employees as indicative of potential in terms of job performance, success, and potential for promotion and career advancement. -Savage, et al., (2010) found that "university plays a crucial role in ensuring graduates develop lifelong learning skills and attributes that can carry them onto a long and fruitful career, however, professionals and students did not feel universities were doing enough to ensure this development occurred". While universities are recognised as having a primary role in fostering work readiness in graduates, it has been debated whether the educational institutions are the principal places for students to gain employability skills (Cranmer, 2006). Readiness, therefore, is the state of being prepared for a particular situation or for something to happen (Ord, 2010). It is an aspect of the research work that seeks to ascertain the level of preparedness on the part of the employers of labour in the employment or hiring of open and distance education graduate (Ehondor&Omoruyi, 2013).

Readiness is not merely a state of preparedness, but a theme that has permeated most aspects of human sectors (Ord, 2010). Work readiness is often understood as the ability to obtain employment that provides

wages sufficient to support a small family and that offers the ability to advance in the occupation (U.S. Department of Labour, 2000). One main component often linked with readiness discussions centres on the ability of employers of labour to be able to hire workers with the right skills learned through the educational process (National Work Readiness Credential, 2006). However, it is obvious that no organization can function without a strong readiness capability.

Statement of the Research Problem

In spite the ever-increasing number of tertiary institutions that are available in the country, the number of admission seekers into institutions of higher learning is on a rapid increase so much that the available conventional schools cannot solely cater for the rising need of prospective students as physical infrastructures and human resources are inadequate. Even when these facilities are available, some admission seekers still prefer to enrol for distance learning programmes because of their job and family engagements. Distance learning is therefore complementing the conventional university system through the provision of higher education to willing candidates who should be able to compete and contribute to the manpower need of society in the labour market after graduation.

More so, in developed countries of the world, the labour market is opened to all trends of graduates without any form of discrimination based on types of institution attended. In these countries, the ability to meet up with job productivity demands, skills and competencies possessed by a job applicant is of paramount importance. However, in Nigeria, there has been a great controversy surrounding the quality of distance learning graduates. For instance, there is a trending debate on whether distance learning graduates should be allowed to participate in the mandatory one-year national youth service. Also, it is being debated whether law graduates from such institutions should be allowed to proceed for the bar programme at the Law School. These arguments, debates and controversies bother on employability skills possessed by graduates from these institutions.

In the face of these debates, the researchers deem it necessary to investigate the readiness of employers of labour in recruiting and releasing their employees from ODL institutions instead of these needless public debates. Having employed graduates from both conventional and distance learning institutions, do they find them comparable in terms of employability skills, competencies and job deliverables? Hence, this study was carried out to investigate the readiness of employers of labour toward distance learning graduates in Niger State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions will guide the study:

    I.   Are employers of labour ready to recruit ODL graduates as employees in their organizations?
   II.   Are employers of labour ready to release their employees for further studies in ODL institutes?
  III.   Does difference exists in the mean response based on the readiness of public and private employers of labour regarding recruitment of ODL graduates as employees in their organizations?
  IV.   Does difference exists in the mean response of public and private employers of labour regarding their readiness in releasing their employees for further studies in ODL institutes?

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested:

HO1   There is no significant difference in the readiness of public and private employers of labour regarding recruitment of ODL graduates as employees in their organizations.

HO3   There is no significant difference in the readiness of public and private employers of labour regarding the release of their employees to pursue further studies in ODL institutes.

Methodology

The research design that was adopted for this study is the descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey research is suitable where a group of people or many items is studied by collecting and analyzing data from their representatives. The descriptive survey design is selected because of its high degree of representativeness and the ease in which the researcher obtained the participants' opinion (Polit& Beck, 2004). The questionnaire was used to obtain the needed data from respondents (employers of labour) on their readiness in the recruitment ODL graduates in their organization and releasing their employees to go for further studies in any open and distance learning institutes.

The population of this study consist of all Human Resource professionals from both private and public organizations whose job titles indicate being responsible for employment, recruitment, and placement of job applicants in the Minna Metropolis of Niger State.A multi-stage sampling technique was employed in selecting respondents for this study. Firstly, purposive sampling procedure was used to select two local governments (Bosso and Chanchaga) in Minna Metropolis of Niger State. The purposive sampling procedure was used to identify 50 establishments and industries based on people's opinion as organizations that recruited and employed many graduates within the last ten years. Thereafter, the stratified sampling technique was used to classify the establishments into either public or private organizations. Simple random sampling technique was then used to select 10 establishments from each of the two strata, from where five management staff and recruitment/establishment officers were sampled. Hence, there were 50 participants each from private and public establishments.

Researchers-developed questionnaire entitled 'Readiness of Employers of Labour toward Distance Learning Graduate (RELDLG)' was used as an instrument for data collection. It consists of four sections (A, B &C). Section A focused on respondents' demography (name of the organization, duty, year of experience and rank). Section B comprises of 10 items on the respondents' level of readiness towards the recruitment of ODL graduate. Section C comprises of 12 items on the respondents' level readiness as regarding the release of their employees for further studies in ODL institutes. A mean score within and above the decision mean of 3.0 was regarded as agreement while below 3.0 was regarded as disagreement. The questionnaire was validated by three distance learning experts and two behavioural psychology specialists. Their comments and suggestions were used to improve on the final copy of the instrument. Thereafter, a pilot test was conducted on 10 randomly selected respondents that have similar characteristics with the sample of the study and within the study area. The result of the analysis was used to determine the internal consistence of the questionnaire. Cronbach alpha's formula was used and 0.83, (for Readiness to recruit construct) and 0.75 (for Readiness to release construct) were obtained. Hence the validity and reliability of the instrument were ensured before proceeding to the field for data collection.

Ethical considerations such as confidentiality, integrity were ensured during the data collection process which lasted for four weeks. The data collected were analyzed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS, Version 23) to ensure accuracy. Data gathered from the administered questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Two of the four research questions were answered using Mean and Standard Deviation while the other two were translated to null hypotheses which were tested using independent sample t-test.

A five-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA, 5 points), Agree (A, 4 points), Undecided (U, 3 points), Disagree (D, 2 points) and Strongly Disagree (SD, 1 point) was used in weighing responses to items in the questionnaire. A mean response below 3.0 was considered disagreement (negative readiness) while a mean response of 3.0 and above was considered as an agreement (positive readiness). Also, alpha value of 0.05 was used as a benchmark for accepting or rejecting hypothesis in which, hypothesis that set-test analysis results inalpha value of 0.05 and above was accepted while hypothesis whose t-test analysis results in alpha value below 0.05 were rejected.

Results

In order to determine the perception of employers of labour about distance learning graduates, responses of 100 respondents to the 10 questionnaire items were collated and analyzed as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation responses of employers of labour's readiness in recruiting ODL graduates in their organization

S/N	Item: I am ready to:	N	$\bar{x}$	Std. Dev	Decision
1	Employ any ODL graduate that posses the needed requirements.	100	3.73	0.874	Agree
2	Acknowledge any certificate that comes from ODL institutes and rate them equally with the ones that comes from conventional universities	100	4.04	0.777	Agree
3	Help my ODL graduate employees to maximize and utilize their potential in their various work area	100	4.57	0.590	Agree
4	Give consideration to any applicant or prospective employee that finished or graduated from distance learning institutes but based on his/her competency.	100	4.03	0.745	Agree
5	permit my ODL graduate employees to get to the positions of the executive council of my establishment based on	100	3.99	0.732	

		100			Agree
	their competence, hard work and years of service (no limitation to their promotion)				
6	Ensure that there is good inter-personal relationship among all my employees from different institutional background.(no inferiority complex)	100	3.74	0.719	Agree
7	Make employment open to all categories of employees who wish to apply to my establishment without any restriction.	100	4.13	0.580	Agree
8	Allow any ODL graduates aspirants to gain access to any available vacancies on my application website.	100	3.92	0.748	Agree
9	ODL graduates will be given the privilege of first come- first serve on the platform of the best qualified persons and not aftermath's thought	100	3.99	0.643	Agree
10	Treat all application with an open mind without any segregation	100	4.01	0.703	Agree
	Grand Mean		3.99	0.828	**Agree**

Decision mean = 3.0

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of responses on employers of labours readiness in recruiting open and distance learning graduates in their organisation. The table reveals that the mean scores of responses to each of the items (ranging from 3.73 to 4.57) was consistently above the decision mean of 3.0. A grand mean score of 3.99 with the standard deviation of 0.828 was recorded for the 10 items. Since, the decision mean 3.0, this implies that respondents are in agreement with the statements; this therefore implies that employers of labour are ready to recruit open and distance learning graduates in their organisation in Minna metropolis, Niger State.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of responses on Employers of labour's readiness in releasing their employees for further studies in ODL Institutes

S/N	Item	N	$\bar{x}$	Std. Dev	Decision
	I am ready to:				
1	Give consideration to any employee who wish to attained any ODL courses of their choice	100	4.20	0.725	Agree
2	Encourage my employees to undergo any relevant courses that can bring about productive in their area specialization through ODL mode.	100	4.37	0.747	Agree
3	Approve study leave to my employees who wishes to undergo distance learning programme when necessary	100	3.62	1.126	Agree
4	Gladly upgrade and promote any employee who possesses additional qualification through distance learning mode.	100	4.26	0.747	Agree
5	Create a form of ODL opportunity to encourage my employee to upgrade their knowledge more often for better productivity.	100	4.20	0.876	Agree
6	Willingly allow my ODL employees to take up online research work where/when necessary.	100	4.44	0.715	Agree
7	Make the nature of my work flexible enough in order to give room for my ODL employees to go for further studies or training to upgrade their certificate and enhance better work productivity.	100	3.99	1.078	Agree
8	Encourage my ODL employees to go for in-service training in any ODL institutes or affiliated schools in order to upgrade their knowledge.	100	4.10	0.990	Agree
9	Support my ODL employee with loan facility in order to help them cope with their studies	100	3.49	1.087	Agree

		N	Mean	S.D	Decision
	while they are still working.				
10	Provide a good internet facilities in the work place to enhance online training for my ODL employees	100	4.12	0.902	Agree
11	Mobilize my ODL employees to go digital in all aspect of work production through online training programmes.	100	4.30	0.772	Agree
	Grand Mean		**4.10**	**0.901**	**Agree**

Decision mean = 3.0

Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of responses on employers of labour's readiness in releasing their employees to go for further studies in open and distance learning institutes. The table reveals that the mean scores of responses to each of the items (ranging from 3.37 to 4.44) was consistently above the decision mean of 3.0. A grand mean score of 4.10 with the standard deviation of 0.901 was recorded for the 11 items. Since, the decision mean 3.0, this implies that respondents are in agreement with the statements; this therefore implies that employers of labour are ready to release their employees for further studies in open and distance learning institutes in Minna metropolis, Niger State.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the readiness of public and private employers of labour regarding recruitment of ODL graduates as employees in their organizations.

To test this hypothesis, independent sample t-test was applied on the mean responses of employers of labour in public and private organization on their readiness in recruiting ODL graduates in their organization in Minna metropolis, Niger State as presented in Table 4.10.

Table 3: Independent sample t-test analysis of mean responses of employers of labour in public and private organization on their readiness in recruiting ODL graduates in their organization

Type of organization	N	Mean	S.D	df	t-value	p-value	Decision
Public	40	29.83	5.800				
				98	-2.996[*]	0.003	Reject
Private	60	32.52	3.154				

NS: Significant at 0.05 level

Table 3 presents the result of independent sample t-test analysis of difference in the mean responses of employers of labour in public and private organization on their readiness in recruiting ODL graduates in their organization in Minna metropolis, Niger State. The table reveals a significant difference in the mean responses of the two groups (t=-2.996, df = 98, p < 0.05). Hence, hypothesis two (Ho$_2$) was rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference in the readiness of employers of labour in public and private organizations in Minna metropolis, Niger State.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the readiness of public and private employers of labour regarding the release of their employees to pursue further studies in ODL institutes.

To test this hypothesis, independent sample t-test was applied on the mean responses of employers of labour in public and private organization on their readiness to release their employees for further studies in ODL institutes as presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Independent sample t-test analysis of mean responses of employers of labour in public and private organization on the release of their employees for further studies in ODL institutes

Type of organization	N	Mean	S.D	df	t-value	p-value	Decision
Public	40	47.68	7.216				
				98	1.549^{ns}	0.125	Accept
Private	60	49.95	7.184				

NS: Not Significant at 0.05 level

Table 4 presents the result of independent sample t-test analysis of difference in the mean responses of employers of labour in public and private organisation on the release of their employees for further studies in ODL institutes in Minna metropolis Niger State. The table reveals an insignificant difference in the mean responses of the two groups (t=1.549, df = 98, p > 0.05). Hence, hypothesis three (Ho$_3$) was accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the readiness of public and private employers of labour regarding the release of their employees to pursue further studies in ODL institutes.

Conclusion

From the findings of this study, it can be concluded that employers of labourare ready to recruit distance learning graduates as staff in their establishment and they are also ready to release them for relevant job studies at distance learning institutes. Both private and public establishments consider graduates of distance learning institutes employable.

Recommendations

presents Based on the findings that emanated from this study, it is recommended that that individuals willing to attend distance learning institutes but are scared because of the fear of not been able to secure job should be sensitized and made aware that employers of labour consider graduates of such institutes employable and are ready to offer them jobs in their organizations. Also, scholarships should be made available of employees in organizations who are willing to enrol for further studies in distance learning institutes.

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