

Students' Preparation for Work in an Informative and Technological Changing World

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ABSTRACT: In an era of acceleration and increasing uncertainty pervading this changing world, the challenges to tackle are immense. One cannot be in the business of predicting what employers will want in the next three to five decades. But we can describe the kind of citizens we want to turnout from our schools-students who are critical, innovative and reflective, students who are adaptable and comfortable to change and global outlook. Hence, schooling should provide young people with the knowledge they need to approach the future with a dynamic and forward thinking mindset. Therefore, whether today's young people are well prepared to take advantage of tomorrow's opportunities is evident on the faces of the children in our classrooms today. As a result, this paper examines students' preparation for work in an informative and technological changing world. It looks into student education in preparation for work in a changing world, the changing world of work and problems facing University education and its products. The paper concludes among others that university products are most affected in the world of work that the situation is not hopeless. To keep pace with transformation, it calls for re-positioning of university education and reorientation of university products to develop knowledge, skills and behaviours towards the changing world. That education will no longer just be about "knowing", but will require student to focus on the development of soft skills, communication, creative thinking and flexibility. With the fact that education could easily get lost in its quest to train children for the jobs of tomorrow, educators must therefore, focus on more than just "professional" development but on relevance of student in the outside world.

I. INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt of the fact that parents and teachers often ask children what they want to become when they grow up. Though the question might seem simple to spark their thinking, but it may prove of little value these days with technology changing at the speed of light. So, how does an academic institution prepare its students for future or job market that is uncertain? Helping students understand the world and finding their feet in it is an important part of education. With the fast growing and changing global job market as well as understanding the world around, student needs to be able to adapt to and embrace change, particularly with the fast-paced developments in technology. The rate at which technology is advancing and rate of information flow is increasing and attention spans are shrinking. Most university graduates are underemployed or employed for jobs that do not require a degree. Employers struggle to find new graduates who have what it takes to thrive in the work force. A poll of hiring managers is asking "Are students ready for today's dynamic workplace?" The result revealed that seven in ten employers say no (<https://blog.adobe.com/>).

The question therefore is how can educational programmes around the globe prepare students for the new challenges, one of the most crucial and deeming steps into the workplace and adult life? As global industries, communities and societies constantly evolve and adapt to meet a new set of challenges, such as preparing students for an evolving era of increased complexity, automation and hyper-connectivity, it is crucial for those working in education to engage in their role at the forefront of this change. This is why Watson (2017) stressed that schooling should provide young people with the knowledge they need to approach the future with a dynamic and forward-thinking mindset. That they should be taught about the connected nature of knowledge and instil in them the confidence and skills to question conventional wisdom and solve fluid and connected problems all of which comes back to teaching people how to think for themselves. This will help ensure that today's students are prepared to face not only the current challenges, but are able to pre-empt, identify and effectively plan to tackle issues that are yet to arise, or have not been encountered globally in the past.

For many students, there is a mismatch between the knowledge they have acquired while in school and the skills they require in the workplace, and the lack of synergy between the two can make their years of school learning seem misdirected and even obsolete. Adegbesan (2011) stated that people and nations are what they are because of the nature and type of education they are exposed to. Education today must have the effect of making it possible for a country to have a steady supply of highly creative citizens who help to keep improving the living conditions of the general citizenry and to solve the existential problems that are thrown up from time to time (Adegbesan, 2011). Nigeria is sixty two years old as an independent nation and the philosophy of education since 1960 has been that of propagating functional and self-reliance education. National Policy on Education (1998) revised (2004) categorically spelt out the philosophy of education in Nigeria. However, in most cases actual performance of Nigerian graduates who have certificates raise doubts about the authenticity and workability of this philosophy. Nigerians who are products of universities are issued with beautiful certificates after passing prescribed courses. Employers complain that many university graduates are poorly prepared for work. In many cases, employers compensate for inadequate academic preparation by organizing remedial courses for new employees. Developed countries subject graduates of our universities to examinations in an attempt to ensure fitness into their own system. Nigerian university education system emphasizes theoretical knowledge at the expense of education for economic development.

It is observed that all acquired knowledge in the university is directed towards practical utilization in various jobs, this has brought about the question of whether student preparation is adequate enough to work effectively in a changing world where digitalization or automation is the other of the day.

II. STUDENT EDUCATION IN PREPARATION FOR WORK IN A CHANGING WORLD

With globalization and the advent of technology in place today, the world has become smaller than it was many years ago. Student will therefore need to learn and move with the tide of the development and evolvement of the world. In the face of such tremendous change, students will need to have different skills. Hence, education will no longer just be about “knowing”, but will require focus on the development of soft skills, communication, creative thinking and flexibility so that students can thrive in the workforce in a changing world. According to Edwards (2020), the world is in an era of high-stakes testing and global comparisons, which has engendered an urgent need to re-examine the world’s educational systems. The educational foundations that one could once point to with pride is now being brought into question as to whether this is an education worth having. The tectonic shift from didactic to heuristic pedagogy has left most school systems woefully unprepared to scale up for this progressive mindset and universal reality; the departure from predicated skillsets ideal for an industrial construct, and the shift to creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship and non-cognitive skills is proving to be more apt and desirable for 21st Century life opportunities. Today’s youth need to accelerate to keep up with the pace of change and the confluence of mitigating factors that have tilted the trajectory of the future. The influx of new ideas and educational thought, the diversity of new reality requires resilience and the right tools in order to embrace and thrive in a world that is not static, but exponentially evolving. As Friedman (2016) stressed that average is officially over 20 to 50 years ago, after graduation, one gets a job but now, there is a need for graduates to invent jobs.

Education is being perceived as preparation for adulthood and every other responsibility that comes with it, bearing that in mind, students need to develop a wide set of skills in the course of education than the traditional classroom learning. However, the focus on academic, vocational, and technical skills (Brewer, 2013) has shifted toward an aspiration for education to inform both work and life more generally (Pellegrino & Hilton, 2012). The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2016) acknowledges this shift in the focus of education toward a broader approach. Of particular interest for Skills for a Changing World, Sustainable Development Goal calls for skills beyond literacy and numeracy—including readiness for primary education, technical and vocational skills, and skills needed to promote global citizenship and sustainable development. These targets signal an emphasis on the breadth of skills necessary to prepare children, youth, and adults comprehensively for 21st century citizenship and life. Students therefore need to acquire digital skills outside the school curriculum so as to be relevant in the ever changing and growing workforce.

III. THE CHANGING WORLD OF WORK

The changing nature of work is reflected in a host of various reasons one of which is technology which has render many job obsolete as automation is the new phenomenon in the changing world of work.

It therefore observed that the combination of fast computers, global networks, and sophisticated software is eliminating more jobs than it creates. Just as technology is reordering the workplace, globalization is also changing the rules of the workforce game. The change in work place calls for a changing career orientation in terms of development. Career development aims at preparing students for successful employment when they leave the university system. Unfortunately, most of the products of tertiary institutions in many developing nations are without skills needed in the labour market and as such, they are out-dated at graduation and are therefore unable to compete in the fast changing work place. Many tasks requires assimilation as a result of many complex tactical and strategic tasks, increasing amounts of new knowledge, personal thinking, application and problem solving abilities and high work load with extremely variable contents. The workplace situation thus makes career development inevitable (Adamu, 2015). Nigeria is a nation in transition from state-led-economy to private-sector-led-economy. Therefore like most transitions, it is crisis-laden either temporarily or otherwise. This crisis is partly evidenced in highly limited employment opportunities and the new character of job requirements; hence there is the need for activation of the traditional sectors of the economy with entrepreneurship education in such areas as agriculture, fishing, pottery etc. In these areas university products could be gainfully employed.

Problems Facing University Education and its Products : In Nigeria today, there is an increased search for skilled workers and specialists in different fields of endeavours, university education therefore has a role to play with regards to long range unemployment of university products. There is a declining job market for university products that lack skills or ability to utilize the knowledge acquired from the university. There is a difficulty in pointing out the exact problem of university products, it could be a problem of lecturers transmitting impracticable education from the colonial masters to the students or that lecturers themselves are not capable of imparting functional skills that will be useful in the outside world.

In the outside world, outside the classroom, it is often observed that a B.Sc. holder in Mechanical Engineering could tow his broken down vehicle to an illiterate road side mechanic for repairs. B.Sc Agriculture graduates are known not to be able to operate a tractor or any other agricultural equipment and holders of B.Sc computer science who cannot type and print their application letters abound. There is also the tendency of well to do Nigerians to travel overseas for mere medical checkups in spite of our numerous medical personnel in the country. These occurrences are real and mind disturbing. The educational curriculum aims at the total educational development of the individual through the acquisition of skills, knowledge and attitudes while the syllabus is purely examination focused and hence, contains only the content that will enable students to achieve excellence in their examination. The aspect that needs to be looked at closely is the content of the curriculum studies and the acquisition of specific knowledge, skills and attitudes. If standards are to be measured by the curriculum content of academic programmes of Nigerian universities, the quality measured will be similar to those found elsewhere in similar programmes. The problem may be lack of delivering and clear translation of the content to the understanding of the students (Adamu, 2015). Lecturers need to meet the standards clearly stated in the National Policy on Education (2004). The policy prescribes that all teachers in educational institutions, including universities, should be professionally trained. According to Baikie (2006), the import of this provision is to give lecturers competence in their respective subject matter, pedagogy-exposure, and experience in principle and practice of education, skill processes, resourcefulness, behaviour motivation and finally evaluation of self. With regards to the above policy requirements, lecturers are not trained. Majority of lecturers argue that they have been in the university for many years lecturing so they do not need to obtain teacher training certificate to lecture.

According to Adamu (2015), Nigerian universities present problems which are summarized as follows:

- Universities admit students with diverse educational background and this leads to students studying courses for which they have no aptitude and are therefore exposed to learning material for which they are ill-prepared to assimilate.
- Universities are faced with the problems of facilities and under funding. A large number of students have to use limited classrooms, hostels, and technologies.
- Universities produce large numbers of graduates, and all of whom expect to join the labour force. According to NUC (2022), Nigeria has two hundred and four Universities. The existence of these implies that there is a large production of young men and women who are willing and ready to work. However, some employers in the country now insist on the acquisition of second – class upper degree as a prerequisite for employment, while others require years of working experience (Sun New, 2004).

Globally, the public sector is under intense pressure to reposition its operations to become relevant in this ever changing world. It is thus necessary for both developed and non-developed countries to search for result-oriented ways of undertaking, organizing and managing public services and ultimately, redefining the role of modern states. The new paradigm advocates “the application of private sector management practices into the public sector, strengthening the prerogatives of managers, measuring performance, increasing competitiveness and cost cutting”. The traditional role of the state as the primary employer of labour, is not plausible as public sector management is now concerned with concepts such as “downsizing” “right sizing” and “contracting”. This development has practically heightened the state of insecurity, distrust and even discontent among a large number of university products who seek public employment. Teaching itself involves the process of imparting knowledge to an individual with a view of creating permanent useful changes in the individual. This involves prudence, skill; organizational acumen, effectiveness and proficiency in language. The effectiveness of language is pertinent because communication in the universities is pertinent whether from teachers to students or students to students. Poor command of language is a factor militating against university education because their products do not care to learn correct pronunciation, syntax and semantics of the language. It is obviously difficult for a graduate who has poor command of English language to pass down a message. According to a recent World Bank study, employers complain that the quality of university products especially their communication skills have fallen continually for two decades (Boltag, 2002). All these call for repositioning of educational system to meet the challenges posed by changing world.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper has shown that university products are most affected in the world of work. The situation is not hopeless. To keep pace with transformation, it calls for re-positioning of university education and reorientation of university products to develop knowledge, skills and behaviours through entrepreneurship education that are on demand by different employees. In addition, for student to be relevant and be prepared for work in a changing world, the factor of globalisation must be considered, which requires students to think differently. Students therefore need to be globally competent to understand other cultures and be comfortable with cultural complexities. Students of the future need to learn how to discern, aggregate and synthesise information in ways beyond imagination. In the face of such tremendous change, students need to have different skills. Hence, education will no longer just be about “knowing”, but will require student to focus on the development of soft skills, communication, creative thinking and flexibility. But education could easily get lost in its quest to train children for the jobs of tomorrow. Educators must therefore, focus on more than just “professional” development but on relevance of student in the outside world. It is easy to think that education can be improved just by getting the right curriculum, right testing system and right management scheme, and that somehow these will create great schools. Teachers thus have an important task to play. They shape future generations. They must be knowledgeable and creative, but they must also empathise and communicate on a daily basis with students. Student need to prepare for work in a changing world by being and staying relevant with digital skill and automation as technology is taking over in an ever changing world. If the future citizens will need to reinvent themselves and constantly adapt to change, then education will need to focus even more on learning how to learn as well as what to learn. Hence, future thinking and preparing for the future matters more now than ever before.

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