



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

**EXPLORING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS INITIATIVES PRACTICE IN  
NIGERIAN TECHNICAL HIGHER EDUCATION**

**AHMED UMAR RUFAl**

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IN NIGERIAN TECHNICAL HIGHER EDUCATION**

By

**AHMED UMAR RUFAl**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in  
fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**August 2015**

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## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to Almighty 'ALLAHU'(SWT) and his prophet 'MUHAMMAD' (SAW), and to the memory of my late Brother, Col. Abubakar Garba Ahmed, my Beloved Sister, Aisha Ahmed and finally my Father, late Ahmed Rufai who never lived to see me accomplished this Academic pursuit he had so much cherished (may their souls rest in peace).



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**August 2015**

**Chairman : Professor Ab. Rahim bin Bakar, PhD**  
**Faculty : Educational Studies**

The significance of education to national development is widely recognized, it is acknowledged that it influences positively economic growth and development. Further it is argued, the growth and development of this nature hinges predominantly on the quality and quantity of Education (World Bank, 2000). Of recent employers in Nigeria complained that some of the professional graduates from the tertiary institutions have the certificates but lack the practical occupational skills, or job experience, and therefore they are considered incompetent for not being able to relate the theoretical part of their education to the practical working environment in industry. As a result of this, there was 'skill gap' occurring between the demand of employment and the level of educational preparation of graduates, indeed calls for research for a common and effective model or framework of employability that can withstand the test of present day labour market requirement. It was the awareness of this gap in our educational system and the need to bring closer institutions and employer to a more beneficial working relationship that motivated the need for this study.

The broad objective of the study is to explore employability skills initiative in Nigerian Technical higher education. Specifically, the aim was to have an in depth investigation on how the tertiary institutions in particular, Universities and Polytechnics in Nigeria seek to enhance graduate employability skills using various approaches. The study was guided by the following five research questions; what is the perception of employability by the academic staff and employers? What skill competence do the employers look for in a contemporary graduate of higher education? What are ways in which the academic department engaged in developing employability skills? How are the employers involved in the planning and implementation of higher education curricula? And what are the skill competences required to evolve a new framework.

The Research method was essentially qualitative, Grounded theory design was selected. The researcher collected documents, conducted semi-structured interviews and recorded observations in cross-section of subject discipline within the academic departments of universities and polytechnics in Nigeria and some selected companies. The study through extensive review of literature, and interviews, captured the collective voices of experts, and professionals from the academics and companies on the development of employability skills, consequently, series of findings emerged, through which a new model of 'ES' evolved.

The study findings include among others; that the concept of employability skills underpin two broad areas, subject or discipline based skills and generic skills and it has to do with individual characteristics behavior in terms of occupational skills that makes him work

ready; that employers describe an employable graduate as person with flexible attitudes towards work and career, someone with self-theories that create in himself confidence and optimism. Apart from subject skills, the study found that, personal attributes are mostly preferred by employers. These include, interpersonal skills, creativity, teamwork, adaptability, critical thinking/problem solving ability, emotional intelligence, awareness of work environment and attitudes; embedding learning skills into the curricula was found to be more result oriented than other initiatives; other findings includes provision of effective teaching methods and institution employer partnership, improved learning environment and facilities. Finally the study developed a new framework based on USEM account of employability. The new model has four main components. Subject, employment development opportunities, reflection, and employability.

In addition to the new proposed framework, the study recommend that both the institutions employers partnership to reconsider a new way of thinking to form considerable flexible commitment from both stakeholders to share the needs, problem, strength, and weakness of educational programmes. The study further recommend the need to overhaul the curricula to systematically address learning of employability, by and large, academic staff, in addition to the subject knowledge, should possess a wide range of teaching methods or strategies.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

## **TINJAUAN TERHADAP AMALAN TERBAIK INISIATIF KEMAHIRAN KEBOLEHPASARAN PENDIDIKAN TINGGI TEKNIKAL DI NIGERIA**

Oleh

**AHMED UMAR RUFAl**

**Ogos 2015**

**Pengerusi : Profesor Ab. Rahim bin Bakar, PhD**

**Fakulti : Pengajian Pendidikan**

Kepentingan pendidikan terhadap pembangunan kebangsaan memang telah diiktiraf secara meluas, dan aspek pendidikan diakui mampu mempengaruhi pertumbuhan dan pembangunan ekonomi secara positif. Pertumbuhan dan perkembangan ekonomi juga bergantung pada kualiti dan kuantiti Pendidikan (Bank Dunia, 2000). Majikan mutahir di Nigeria mengeluh tentang sesetengah mahasiswa profesional lepasan ijazah dari institusi pengajian tinggi memiliki sijil tetapi kurang kemahiran pekerjaan praktikal, atau pengalaman bekerja, dan dengan demikian mereka dianggap tidak kompeten untuk mengaitkan teori yang telah dipelajari oleh mereka dengan persekitaran pekerjaan praktikal di industri. Oleh sebab itu, terdapatnya jurang dari segi kemahiran antara tuntutan pekerjaan dan tahap penyediaan pendidikan mahasiswa yang sememangnya memerlukan penyelidikan bagi mendapatkan suatu model yang umum dan efektif atau kerangka kebolehpasaran yang dapat menampung ujian keperluan pasaran tenaga kerja kini. Kesedaran tentang wujudnya jurang dalam sistem pendidikan serta keperluan untuk merapatkan hubungan antara institusi dengan majikan supaya dapat menjalin hubungan kerja yang lebih bermanfaat inilah yang mendorong supaya kajian ini dijalankan.

Objektif utama kajian ini adalah untuk meninjau inisiatif kemahiran kebolehpasaran pendidikan tinggi teknikal di Nigeria. Secara khususnya, tujuan kajian ini adalah untuk meneliti secara mendalam bagaimana institusi tinggi, khususnya universiti dan politeknik di Nigeria berusaha untuk meningkatkan kemahiran kebolehpasaran mahasiswa menggunakan pelbagai pendekatan. Kajian ini menggunakan dengan lima soalan kajian berikut: iaitu Apakah persepsi tentang kebolehpasaran oleh staf akademik dan majikan? Apakah kemahiran kompeten yang dicari oleh majikan bagi mahasiswa kontemporari pendidikan tinggi? Apakah cara jabatan akademik dalam usaha untuk memperkembangkan kemahiran kebolehpasaran? Bagaimanakah majikan terlibat dalam perancangan dan pelaksanaan kurikula pendidikan tinggi? dan Apakah kemahiran kompeten yang diperlukan bagi mewujudkan kerangka baharu?

Kaedah kajian ini ialah kualitatif, reka bentuk teori Grounded telah dipilih. Penyelidik telah mengumpul dokumen, menjalankan temu duga separastruktur dan merekodkan pemerhatian keratan rentas bagi disiplin subjek dalam jabatan akademik di universiti dan politeknik dan beberapa syarikat terpilih di Nigeria. Kajian ini melalui sorotan literatur yang ekstensif, dan temubual, memperoleh pandangan kolektif pakar, dan profesional dari akademik dan syarikat tentang pembangunan kemahiran kebolehpasaran, seterusnya, beberapa siri dapatan diperoleh, dengan ini model baharu, iaitu ES dibangunkan.

Kajian ini mendapati bahawa, antara lain; konsep kemahiran kebolehpasaran merangkumi dua bidang besar, iaitu subjek atau disiplin berdasarkan kemahiran dan kemahiran generik serta ia berkaitan dengan ciri tingkah laku individu dari segi kemahiran pekerjaan yang menjadikannya bersedia untuk dunia pekerjaan. Konsep kebolehpasaran juga bermakna majikan berpendapat bahawa siswazah yang boleh diambil bekerja sebagai seseorang yang mempunyai sikap yang fleksibel terhadap pekerjaan dan kareer, seseorang yang mempunyai teori sendiri yang dibina dalam dirinya keyakinan dan sikap optimis. Selain kemahiran tentang subjek, kajian ini mendapati bahawa atribut personal merupakan ciri yang digemari oleh majikan. Atribut tersebut, termasuklah kemahiran interpersonal, kreativiti, kerja berkumpulan, kebolehsesuaian, pemikiran kritikal/ kebolehan penyelesaian masalah, kecerdasan emosional, kesedaran terhadap persekitaran pekerjaan dan sikap; penyiratan kemahiran belajar ke dalam kurikulum didapati lebih berorientasikan hasil berbanding inisiatif lain; dapatan lain, termasuklah penyediaan kaedah pengajaran yang efektif serta perkongsian majikan dan institusi, persekitaran pembelajaran dan kemudahan yang ditingkatkan. Kajian ini membina kerangka baharu berdasarkan akaun kebolehpasaran USEM. Model baharu ini mempunyai 4 komponen utama, iaitu subjek, peluang pembangunan pekerjaan, refleksi, dan kebolehpasaran.

Di samping kerangka baharu yang dicadangkan, kajian ini mencadangkan supaya perkongsian kedua-dua pihak, iaitu institusi dan majikan supaya mempertimbangkan semula pemikiran baharu yang membentuk komitmen yang fleksibel daripada kedua-dua pemegang taruh bagi mengenal pasti keperluan, masalah, kekuatan, dan kelemahan dalam program pendidikan. Kajian ini juga mencadangkan agar keperluan untuk menyemak semula kurikulum serta perbincangan secara sistematik tentang pembelajaran kebolehpasaran, oleh staf akademik, di samping berpengetahuan tentang subjek, juga harus memiliki pelbagai bentuk kaedah atau strategi pengajaran.



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	i
<b>ABSTRAK</b>	iii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	v
<b>APPROVAL</b>	vi
<b>DECLARATION</b>	viii
<b>LISTS OF TABLES</b>	xiii
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	xiv
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	xv
<b>LIST OF ACRONYMS</b>	xvii
<b>CHAPTER</b>	
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 An Overview Of Background Information	1
1.2 Why Employability Has Become An Issue	3
1.3 Nigeria's Tertiary Institutions: Historical Precedence	4
1.4 Development of employability skills within Nigeria Education system	6
1.5 Employability In The Face Of Increasing Unemployment in Nigeria	9
1.6 Employability Skills: An Evolving Concept Defined	11
1.7 What Do Labour Markets Want Of Higher Education?	12
1.8 Statement Of The Problem	13
1.9 Objectives of the Study	14
1.10 Research Questions	14
1.11 Significance of the Study	15
1.12 Delimitation of The Study	16
1.13 Operational Definitions of Important Terms	16
<b>2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE</b>	<b>18</b>
2.1 Introduction	18
2.2 Developing employability skills in other countries.	18
2.3 Theoretical perspectives	31
2.3.1 The Normative Paradigm	32
2.3.2 The Positive Paradigm	32
2.4 The theoretical framework of the study	33
2.5 Conceptual Issues on Higher Education	38
2.6 Conceptual Framework and Propositions	40
2.7 Collaboration between higher education and employer of labour market	43
<b>3 METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>52</b>
3.1 Introduction	52
3.2 Research Design	52
3.2.1 Strategy for Research Design Selection	52
3.2.2 Selection of Qualitative Research Method	52
3.2.3 Grounded Theory	53
3.2.4 Rationale for selecting grounded theory research method	53
3.3 Pilot Study	55

3.4	Sampling	56
3.5	Data Collection Instrument	58
3.5.1	Interviews	58
3.5.2	Interview Conduct Protocol	59
3.5.3	Observations	59
3.5.4	Document collection and analysis	60
3.5.5	Researcher as Instrument	60
3.5.6	Key Informant	61
3.6	Data Analysis	63
3.7	Rigour	63
3.7.1	Credibility	63
3.7.2	Dependability	65
3.7.3	Ethical Considerations	66
<b>4</b>	<b>FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS</b>	<b>68</b>
4.1	Introduction	68
4.2	The selected Companies	68
4.3	The Companies Participants	69
4.3.1	CP1 (PHCN)	69
4.3.2	CP2 (NDE)	69
4.3.3	CP3 (CCNN)	70
4.4	The Selected Universities	70
4.4.1	Introduction	70
4.4.2	'UA' Category (First Generation University)	70
4.4.3	'UB' Category (Second Generation University)	71
4.4.4	'UC' Category (Third Generation University)	71
4.5	The Selected University Participants	72
4.5.1	Introduction	72
4.5.2	UA Category Participants (First Generation University)	72
4.5.3	UB Category Participants (Second Generation University)	73
4.5.4	UC Category Participants (Third Generation University)	74
4.6	The Selected Polytechnics	75
4.6.1	Introduction	75
4.6.2	PA Category (First Generation Polytechnic)	75
4.6.3	'PB' Category (Second Generation Polytechnic)	76
4.6.4	'PC' Category (Third Generation Polytechnic)	76
4.7	The Selected Polytechnic Participants	77
4.7.1	Introduction	77
4.7.2	'PA' Category Participants (First Generation Polytechnic)	77
4.7.3	'PB' Category Participants (second Generation Polytechnic)	78
4.7.4	'PC' Category Participants (third Generation Polytechnic)	79
4.8	Data Analysis	80
4.8.1	Introduction	80
4.8.2	Organization of data	80
4.8.3	Coding Process	81
4.8.4	Interpretation and Representing of Findings	81
4.8.5	Document Analysis	83
4.8.6	Interviews and Observations Data Analysis	84

4.9	Discussion	104
4.9.1	Discussion of Findings	105
4.9.2	Academic staff and Employers of Labour Perception of 'ES'	109
4.9.3	What employers look for in a work-ready graduate	111
4.9.4	Academic Department Involvement in Teaching and Learning 'GES'	115
4.9.5	Total Embedding (Through the whole curriculum)	115
4.9.6	Embedding Employability in the Core Curriculum	116
4.9.7	Employability-Related modules within the Curriculum	116
4.9.8	Work-Based or Work-Related within/parallel with the Curriculum	117
4.9.10	Employer Involvement in Planning and Implementation of 'GES'	119
4.9.11	A new framework could help solve the problem	121
4.9.12	The Proposed Model	122
4.9.13	The component of the model	126
4.9.14	Value of the Proposed Model	127
<b>5</b>	<b>SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>127</b>
5.1	Summary of Findings	127
5.2	conclusion	130
5.3	Recommendations	132
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>135</b>
	<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>148</b>
	<b>BIODATA OF STUDENT</b>	<b>211</b>
	<b>LIST OF PUBLICATIONS</b>	<b>212</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

<b>Table</b>		<b>Page</b>
2.1	Different countries Terminology relating to employability skills	19
2.2	Methods of delivering employability skills in the Higher Education curriculum	22
2.3	Expanded model of methods of delivering employability skills in the higher education curriculum	22
2.4	The Meyer Key Competences	23
2.5	Employability Skills Framework	25
2.6	Comparative table of generic employability skills by country	30
4.1	Summary of the selected companies' background	69
4.2	The Summary of the Companies participants	70
4.3	Summary of the three universities selected and their background	72
4.4	Summary of participants from UA (first generation) University bio-data/background	73
4.5	Summary of participants from UB (second generation) university Bio-data/Background	74
4.6	Summary of the participants from 'UC' (third generation) University bio-data/background	75
4.7	Summary of the three selected Polytechnics based on their background	77
4.8	Summary of the participants from PA (first generation) Polytechnic bio-data/background	78
4.9	Summary of participants from 'PB' (second generation) Polytechnic Bio-data/Background	79
4.10	Summary of the Participants 'PC' (third generation) Polytechnic	80
4.11	Bio-data/Background Top 10 selection criteria for recruiting graduates	110
4.12	Teaching strategies suited to development of employability skills	113

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page	
2.1	Proposed Integrated Approach to Teaching Employability Skills	28
2.2	The 'linking' Premise of the framework	29
2.3	A model of course provision	35
2.4	The essential components of employability	37
2.5	A metaphorical model of employability	38
2.6	The USEM Model	43
3.1	Summary of the strategy for selecting Research design	55
3.2	Summary of Data Collection Processes and Procedures	62
4.1	Summaries the procedure of the analysis	82
4.2	Model of Graduate Employability Skills for HE	122

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

HEIs	Higher Educations Institutions
NPE	National Policy on Education
HND	Higher National Diploma
UK	United Kingdom
EHE	Enterprise in Higher Education
NCIHE	National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education
UCI	University College Ibadan
NBTE	National Board for Technical Education
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
ND	National Diploma
ES	Employability Skills
GES	Graduate Employability Skills
GESA	Graduate Employability Skills Agenda
U.S.A.	United States of America
NVQF	National Vocational Qualification Framework
ESP	Employability Skill Programme
ASCD	Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
TVE	Technical and Vocational education
ACER	Australian Council on Education Review
DEST	Department of Education Science and Training
NQF	National Qualification Framework
HE	Higher Education
ITF	Industrial Training Fund
NEPA	National Electric Power Authority
PHCN	Power Holding Company of Nigeria
ECN	Electric Company of Nigeria
CCNN	Cement Company of Northern Nigeria

NDE	National Directorate of Employment
FGN	Federal Government of Nigeria
KSUST	Kebbi State University of Science & Technology
KBSG	Kebbi State Government





## LIST OF ACRONYMS

‘UA’	University ‘A’ - First Generation
‘UB’	University ‘B’ – Second Generation
‘UC’	University ‘C’ - Third Generation
NSE	Nigerian Society of Engineers
‘UAP1’	University ‘A’ Participant 1
‘UAP2’	University ‘B’ Participant 2
‘UAP3’	University ‘C’ Participant 3
‘CAP’	Company ‘A’ Participant - (PHCN)
‘CBP’	Company ‘B’ Participant – (NDE)
‘CCP’	Company ‘C’ Participant – (CCNN)
‘CA’	Company ‘A’ – (PHCN)
‘CB’	Company ‘B’ – (NDE)
‘CC’	Company ‘C’ – (CCNN)
‘UBP1’	University ‘B’ Participant 1
‘UBP2’	University ‘B’ Participant 2
‘UBP3’	University ‘B’ Participant 3
NCE	Nigeria Certificate in Education
TRCN	Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria
UCP1	University ‘C’ Participant 1
UCP2	University ‘C’ Participant 2
UCP3	University ‘C’ Participant 3
COREN	Council of Registered Engineers of Nigeria
‘PA’	Polytechnic ‘A’ – first generation
‘PB’	Polytechnic ‘B’ – second generation
‘PC’	Polytechnic ‘C’ – third generation
PAP1	Polytechnic ‘A’. Participant 1

PAP2	Polytechnic 'A', Participant 2
PAP3	Polytechnic 'A', Participant 3
PBP1	Polytechnic 'B', Participant 1
PBP2	Polytechnic 'B', Participant 2
PBP3	Polytechnic 'B', Participant 3
PCP1	Polytechnic 'C', Participant 1
PCP2	Polytechnic 'C', Participant 2
PCP3	Polytechnic 'C', Participant 3
KADPOLY	Kaduna Polytechnic
WUFFEDPOLY	Waziri Umaru Federal Polytechnic
AGPTM	Abdu Gusau Polytechnic Talata Mafara
ZMSG	Zamfara State Government
SIWES	Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme
STAN	Science Teachers Association of Nigeria
MAN	Manufacturers Association of Nigeria
RQ	Research Question
B-HERT	Business Higher Education Roundtable
WBL	Work-based Learning
CDS	Community Development Scheme
GAP	Graduate Attachment Program
IDIs	In-depth Interview

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 An Overview of Background Information

Employers of industries and related business organization, professional bodies, universities and curriculum experts in Nigeria and elsewhere in the world, agree that there is need to develop graduates who are highly skilled and ready to face the challenges of increased competition. More than ever, we need graduates who are responsive to economic, social, cultural and technical environmental change and work flexibly and intelligently across business contexts. Employability of graduates has become very serious and critical issue over the world, institutions of higher learning are saddled with enormous challenges one of the greatest among them is to develop employability skills with the intent of enhancing knowledge to make graduates more attractive to employers. In recent times numerous studies have noted with great concern the magnitude for graduates from higher institutions of learning to possess transferable skills that make them employable in the labour market (Hewitt, 2005, Billing, 2003; Atkins, 1999). The world over, employers are demanding workers that are able to transform knowledge and skills learnt into successful workplace performance. Research evidences suggested that employers are more concerned about soft skills or attitudes rather than technical knowledge or competencies. Crebert, Bell and Patrick; (2004) are of the view that it is becoming increasingly important for graduates to be able to apply the knowledge and skills learned in higher education institutions to the workforce. This call for the need for a fundamental shift towards an emphasis on general skills in education.

However, research evidences have clearly shown that graduates of higher institutions are not equipped with the much needed skills necessary for employment particularly at the entry-level and thus are not prepared to enter the workforce (Cragolini 2004; Hesketh & Williams, 2003; Peddle, 2000; Tetreantt, 1997). Dunne and Rawling (2000) asserted that a reason for graduates being ill- prepared to apply the transferable skills to their work is the fact that student often fail to realise the importance of possessing such skills and assume that mastery of technical skills within disciplinary content is more important to employees. Empirical studies on employability skills has shown that soft skills such as problem solving, communication, teamwork, critical thinking and interpersonal skills have become critical for hiring and promoting employees to key positions, thus, are therefore the employability skills most desired by employers. Even though these transferable skills assist every graduate entering the labour market, Candy and Crebert, (1991), notwithstanding concluded that, the level of preparation of such graduates in these areas, left much to be desired. Many reasons were identified to be responsible for lack of graduate adequate preparation before entering the labour market, one of the major reasons noted by researchers is a "Skill gap" occurring between the demand of employment and the level of educational preparation of graduates (Andrew & Wooten, 2005; Kivinen & Silvennoinen, 2002, Morley, 2001; Shivpuri & Kim, 2004; Robison, 2000).

As a matter of fact, employers do not feel as though higher education is succeeding in adequately developing the employability skills of graduates (Peddle, 2000), while the belief by industry and business organisations is that higher education institutions should be responsible for equipping graduates with the necessary and proper skills to achieve success in the workplace. However, before higher education institutions (HEIs) can be held accountable for providing such skills a series of basic questions should be answered; such questions include, what constitutes employability skills and what skills are most important for graduates in performing their jobs? How competent are graduates at performing these skills how can the current curriculum be enhanced to include the necessary skills to better prepare future graduates for the workplace.

The situation regarding Nigerian industries today, requires new graduates who possess those qualities and understanding of the part they play in building, their organizations and the practical skills to work effectively in their roles. However, really contributing in the workplace means more than having the necessary technical skills. It means engaging with the organization and its goal, understanding the dynamics of the workplace, and taking up a job role with an informed knowledge of all its requirements. It also means applying a brand range of employability skills learned in many contexts and through a range of experiences.

For any attempt by Nigerian business aspiring to be more competitive, more effective and more innovative, one should realize that, the graduate workforce is an icy part of the talent pool businesses draw from to further these objectives. Universities and polytechnics clearly want to produce graduates with the skills that are highly regarded by employers and. This will surely help the emerging professionals who always want to attain interesting employment and build their professional careers successfully.

Long before the introduction of 6-3-3-4 educational policy in Nigeria, many criticisms had been levelled on our institutions of higher education, some of which were that their products made little or no contribution to the economic and technological development of the nation that is, Contributions of Nigerian graduates to the development of nation's industries was far below expectation. The consensus was that, the mode and nature of training in these institutions have little or no relevance to the social-economic needs of Nigerian industries, it appears that the original objective of universities serving as centres for generating innovative knowledge and personnel requisite for creating new productions systems on the one hand and polytechnics producing graduate skill manpower to help in maintaining these system especially in industries on the other hand, has been greatly compromised. (Uwaifo 2009).

Vocational education courses in higher educational as contained in the Nigerian national policy on education (NPE, 1981) was defined "as that aspect of education which leads to the acquisition of practical skills as well as basic scientific knowledge". Among the goals and objective of such educations are;

1. Provision of technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agriculture, industrial, commercial and economic development.
2. Provision of skill trained manpower in applied science technology and commerce.

It was the attempt to meet these objectives, which led to the establishment of several other universities and polytechnics and their given specific assignments was to provide adequate competent, and skill human resources, at all levels of the economy. Hence, many new courses and programme were introduced and the curricular of the existing institutions were remarkably improved to meet the present day challenges.

However, one has to realise that, for such programmes in the universities and polytechnics to be wholly effective, students during their training must receive adequate skills that make them employable, complementary to the courses they are studying. This will ensure that students have sufficient opportunities during their daily work to practice and develop their skills in applying techniques and procedures at their place of work (Fagbemi 1988).

This study, undertaken to review and or explore current activities and to explore employability skills development initiative in Nigeria. Consultations with all the stake holders will focus on graduates from degree and higher national diploma (HND). Programmes across some selected disciplines in higher education.

## **1.2 Why Employability has Become an Issue**

In recent years, widening participation, the development and use of employability skills has increasingly become very crucial issue within the contemporary higher education, in the world over, the reason for such emphasis may not be unconnected with the changes taking place in organisational structure couple with the new career patterns that keep on emerging throughout the world. It is widely accepted that the world is facing a technological revolution which brought about a new way of living and in recent times this generated new demands for various countrys' education systems. With over half of each generation now having the opportunity to enter HE, preparation for the world of work has to encompass a much broader spectrum of skills and competencies than it used to (Skilbeck & Connell 1996). This is because with a greater number of graduates, they will be expected to take up employment in a wider range of areas than previously. Also more account will need to be taken of the previous experiences that students bring with them when they enter university if they have already spent time in the workplace. It is also assumed that such technological revolution has profoundly affect the structure and organization of our society, however the speed with which new technologies are adopted to meet up these demands depends largely on the education and skills levels of the workplace i.e. to say the more educated and the higher the skills acquired by the workforce the faster their adaptation to emerging technologies. Marlin, (2007), point out that interest in employability has emerged as a results of the organizational and demographic changes. Employers tend to be looking for individuals who have the capacity to make an immediate and stable career path, to sustain various sectors of the economy characterised by high technology input. The dream of which is far from being achieved, as observed by Burke and Ng (2006), emphasised the fact

that, one can argue that the declining birth rates and aging population are resulting in skill and labour shortages, this development has in recent times consistently increase the calls by employers of industries for employable skill personnel. This was the view of Richardson (2006), that employers are finding it increasingly difficult to attract suitably skilled qualified and experienced employees to meet their current demand as well as future growth needs. This was by no means part of the reasons for consistent call on the universities and colleges to closely align their training programmes with work, and this has to some extent put higher institutions under intense pressure and a challenge to produce and equip graduates that are more ready for professional employment, especially in areas of work-base skill competency, and not just the academic skills traditionally peculiar to subject discipline and or a class of degree. Lindberg (2007), has this to say; the expansion of higher education participation in many countries in recent decades has led to increasing interest by researchers and policy makers in the education to work transition of graduates and extent to which they are ready employable. (Marilyn, 2008).

For example, it is in recognition of this longstanding connection between higher education and the economy that in its review of higher education in the U.K for decades ago, the Robbins Report listed four aims for higher education opening: beginning with instruction in skills suitable to play a part in the general division of labour. The report considered these aims, first in order to avoid the risk that the significance of higher education for the economy might have been neglected or not given enough priority, it further meant on to offer the view that few would enter higher education without an eye to subsequent employment. Against this backdrop in the U.K., the nature of higher education in the recent time has been evolving, although the rate of change has been such that its magnitude has passed almost unnoticed (Yorke, 1999). The initial stimulus for the changes was probably the then Employment Department's Enterprise in Higher Education (EHE) initiative of the late 1980's which was designed to accentuate in higher education the nation of enterprise. Overtime, this evolved into more of a concern with personal qualities and transferable skills and lessened the emphasis on entrepreneurialism. It is probably fair to conclude that EHE has had a lasting effect on curriculum development.

The more recent daring report on higher education (NCIHE, 1997) drew particular attention to the vital role that higher education plays in a modern economy. Global competitiveness, it asserted, required that education and training [should] enable people in an advanced society to compete with the best in the world (NCIHE 1997).

However, experts have cautioned whether human capital is the key to economic well-being (Morley 2001), and whether 'employability' is anything but an empty concept, even if the concept is meaningful in the recent developments, it is debatable whether higher education can develop employability as claimed by experts and professionals (Atkins 1998).

### **1.3 Nigeria's Tertiary Institutions: Historical Precedence**

It cannot be overstated that tertiary institutions are the bedrock of national development. National development is being equated here with human capital development, which in turn reflects qualitative improvement in the living conditions

of the people. The starting point in the evolution of tertiary education in the country, dated back to 1940s at the time when Nigeria's aspiring to acquire university or polytechnic education had to privately arrange this in British universities. Soon after, North American universities and colleges also began to attract Nigerians because of the shortage of places in British institutions partly as a consequence of the First World War.

Pioneers in this trans-Atlantic quest for university education in American higher institutions were Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nwafor Orizu and Kingsly Mbadiwe. As a result of this ground breakthrough enthusiasm, various programmes of sponsorship were organised in the late 1930s and in the 1940s, for Nigerian youths wishing to study in North American institutions, whereas on the Nigeria soil were two tertiary institutions that made some contribution, these were Yaba Higher College which was founded in 1932, and the Yaba Medical School which was established in 1930. Both institutions were subsequently formally integrated into University College Ibadan, and affiliate of London University in 1948. Explaining the mission of UCI at a meeting in Lagos, on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 1948, the first Principal (1948-1953) of the institution, Professor Kenneth Mellanby, said:

“The University College is being established with the primary object of producing a West African University which will be a centre of learning and culture, and which will make maximum contribution to all aspects of the development of the country. The standards of the university college must be equal to those of the best universities of any country but the college must also have an African bias, and while not neglecting any branch of learning, it must concentrate on subjects of special interest and importance to Africa.”

In order to make UCI more relevant to the needs of Nigeria, the courses offered were changed progressively especially during the period from 1957 to 1962. These changes were affected in stages, through a slow but carefully planned process informed by the development needs of the society; the Post Graduate Faculty of the University came into being in 1955. This faculty had professors, E.U.Emeron (Chemistry), J.O.C. Ezeilo (Mathematics), C.O. Olaniyan (Zoology), C.A. Onwumechili (Physics) and C.C. Ifemesia (History) as pioneers.

In the 1960s, Nigerian tertiary institutions grew geometrically from UCI in 1948, which eventually became a full fledge university in 1962. Then the University of Nigeria Nsukka, was established in 1960, followed by the University of Ife, the University of Lagos, and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, all established in 1962. These institutions braced up to the challenges of the nation's human resources needs.

In 1975, the number of universities rose to six and just a year later in 1976, this went up to thirteen. By 1982, there were 20 universities. This soon rose to thirty-one and the rapid growth from this point in time led to the proliferation of universities and polytechnics in the country. Presently, there exist about 128 universities and many polytechnics continue to emerge in Nigeria. This has become disturbing, because the rapid growth rate of these universities neither reflect the realities of the human resources needs of the economy nor do the skills of our graduates meet the quality desired by employers.

The Nigerian university system charged with three basic functions, namely; teaching, research and community services, as enunciated in the nation's education policies is expected to among other things to

- (i) Produce an enlightened citizenry and leaders armed with confidence, flexibility, sound knowledge and technical skills needed to effectively develop the country;
- (ii) Advance the frontiers of knowledge through research and creative intellectual activities, such as lecture series, seminars, conferences and publications in scholarly journals and to use the results of such endeavour in the national development efforts etc. whereas its polytechnic counterpart was established basically to address the issue of manpower in the areas of technicians and technology.

The challenges that face the tertiary education system include how to manage the sector to achieve these goals and making the system ready to adequately and appropriately prepare their students/graduate in the various occupations, if they are to meet the present and future challenges of employment and ultimate development goals of Nigeria (NPE 2004) revised.

#### **1.4. Development of Employability Skills within Nigeria Education System**

Historical records suggest that as industrialization grows, so do concentrations of extreme poverty. Among the more well-to-do, the reaction is fear of riots and crime (NBS 2010). Thus, solutions are sought. Historically, the answer was job training. The rationale that supports this conclusion can be called the "skilled-employability". The rationale was that individuals would be less a threat to society and more law abiding and self-sufficient if they had job skills, therefore, if provided job training, they would find employment and no longer be a threat to the society. By the twentieth century, all industrialized and even non industrialized nations had come to accept the "skill-employability" paradigm that equated job training with individual self-sufficiency and social peace. There is some ex-post evidence to substantiate at least the social effects of unemployment. In a study of effects of diminishing economic opportunities, Merva and Fowles (1992) found that in the United States an increase in unemployment of one percent was associated with a seven percent increase in homicides and a two percent increase in poverty crimes.

The effects of this paradigm cannot be overemphasized. The belief in the "skill-employment" is a major reason why employment and training programmes features prominently in almost every social programme worldwide. Employability skills are found in the public schools, prisons, in programmes for welfare recipients and displaced workers, as well as for the physically and mentally handicapped. The skills employability does have some scientific vitality, namely the economic "human capital development" theory (NBTE 2011).

At the early beginning training for work was accomplished, primarily through apprenticeships. It was the common method of training in most countries. The apprenticeship was indentured to a master craftsman for a period of time to learn a trade or profession and become professional practitioner. "Indeed" Garba (2002), argue that, apprenticeship was the method of learning before aspects or subject to be



learned were identified, isolated, and package as related instruction to be taught in group situation in a classroom. Factory school came into being just prior to the run of the century, the rapid growth in business and industry demanded more master craftsmen that could be produced through the individualized apprenticeship process. The term “factory school” connotes group instruction and use of the printed subject matter and course content to supplement on-the- job training, such companies as western electric, ford, etc. were in the forefront of this educational activity. Where as in Nigeria, education related to employability skills has existed long before the advent of the Europeans, although not in a formal way. Similar to the other countries, Nigeria adopted apprenticeship system to train youth in smiting, wood carving, weaving, forming, basketry, and multiplicity of other local handicrafts.

An aspect of Vocationalism Education in the Nigerian school system which hitherto has been perceived to be linked with the kind of education that is more or less related to employability skills was introduced based on the educational committee report of Privy Council to the colonial office in 1847 (Garba, 2002). Some other efforts at the tertiary level had been at providing teachers for the trade centres, technical colleges and polytechnics. The Universities of Nigeria, Nsukka brazed the trail by establishing in 1962, the department of vocational teacher education, the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria with its affiliate the then Kaduna Polytechnic also established programmes for technical and vocational teacher education.

Whilst in the Nigeria vocational education has always been described as the education which is concerned, with the preparation or development of skilled manpower. It is a form of education, training or retraining which is directed towards developing the learner to become productive in a paid employment or in self-employment. It is therefore the bedrock in which a country’s socio- economic, technological and cultural advancement must be built.

The Government of Nigeria having recognized importance of vocational education towards this direction of preparing students for a constantly changing world of work. Therefore introduce what is known as Introductory Technology as one of the pre-vocational subjects at the Junior Secondary School level, this being one of the early stage of the Nigeria’s attempt towards addressing employability skills even though it all started at the lower secondary school levels. Onyawardume (1999), stated that pre-vocational subjects provide students with a process of orientation in production and consumption through experiences in planning, producing, testing, servicing and evaluating types of consumer and industrial goods. The researcher explain further that, through the exposure of students to pre-vocational subjects, students develop a broader understanding of industrial process as they explore their individual interests and develop aptitudes. This system of introductory technology, students at Junior Secondary School (JSS) level are exposed to various opportunities available in the world of work and are thus oriented in many occupational areas, to see the need for school continuity at Senior Secondary School level and beyond. Introductory technology gives students the opportunity to apply principles of planning and design, construction techniques, and scientific principles to the solution of problems. In order to reduce ignorance about technological and economic development and lay a solid foundation for true national development. In its revised policy on vocational education (2003), the world bank while acknowledge the fact that the development of a skilled labour force marks an important contribution to the development of a

nation, emphasized that, the challenge is to use employers, private and public training capacities effectively to train workers for jobs that use their skills. The assumption there was that training in the private sector – by private employers and in private training institutions – can be the most effective and efficient way to develop the skills of the work place. In most circumstances employers train workers as quickly as possible for existing jobs and the cost is relatively low compared with the training before employment, moreover trained workers are placed automatically in jobs that use their skills.

Some other efforts at providing employability skills in the Nigerian educational system include constant upgrading and improvement of the curricula particularly at the tertiary level. Although Uwaifo (2009), cautioned that, the overhauling of the curricula may not necessarily translate to the production of highly literate ready-made graduates for the labour market which may result in rapid industrialization or growth in the economy of a nation unless solutions are proffered to some constraints that may militate against positive outcomes, but will adequately equip our youths with the relevant skills needed for their day to day living.

Uwaifo (2009), further describe some of the problems associated with the curricula as:

- i. Foreign based model.
- ii. Shortage of competent teaching staff.
- iii. Lack of basic teaching materials.
- iv. Curricula loaded with too much academic and intellectual content.
- v. Inadequate entrepreneurship and skills development courses.

Another very significant aspect in Nigeria's effort towards revitalizing and refocusing its education and training strategy to address peculiar skill manpower needs is the resuscitation of vocational education which has suffered significant decline since the days of craft schools and vocational institutes inherited from the colonial era but neglected soon after independence. The recognition now being given to Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs) and Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEIs) under the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) programme for TVET has been well-received as a confidence building measure to widen access to this very promising avenue for reducing unemployment and promoting the acquisition and development of skills for economic development.

The process for developing a National Vocational Qualifications Framework (NVQF) for the country that will further provide clear, coherent and comprehensive systems of education and training relevant to the needs of employers of labour market and the individual.

The NVQF is a system for the development, classification and recognition of skills, knowledge and competencies acquired by individuals, irrespective of where and how the training or skill was acquired. The system gives a clear statement of what the learner must be able to do whether the learning took place in a classroom, on-the-job, or less formally, the frame indicates the comparability of different qualifications and how one can progress from one level to another.

Thus, a NVQF will provide descriptions of the occupational competences to be demonstrated, as well as a common grid of skill levels for all qualifications included within the framework. Typically, in line with the first NVQF developed in UK in 1986, such framework will be a grid of about five (5) steps from the lowest competence level (an unskilled or semiskilled worker) to the highest (advanced professional). The level descriptors for each framework define the generic outcomes at each level. But the major concern is how and when would this translate into a reality?

### **1.5 Employability in the Face of Increasing Unemployment in Nigeria**

The ultimate goal of education was to produce a man or woman of character with the useful skills appropriate to his or her status in life. The very rapid upsurge in unemployment in the seventies to the present day Nigeria, can be traced to a very large extent to the rapid development of primary education, secondary and tertiary education. The primary education from inception does not give the recipients any skill that could enable them get good jobs. These products of primary education who could not continue into the secondary education become drop-outs and they have no skills to offer employer, while searching for wage employment. The secondary schools supply of graduates have also been out of proportion without the demand for their labour, and of recent the unemployment among the graduates of tertiary institutions has become a national issue than ever before. This is due to the fact that education and employment are often related in all economies. From this viewpoint, training in Education is seen to be of the principle reasons for an excellent employability/job stability performance (Mamaqi et al 2011).

Unemployment is everywhere now in Nigeria and it involves more than simply out of job or work, in real sense. It is when a person is seriously looking for job that can earn him a living and become successful throughout his life career. The agony of unemployment has continued to be the greatest problem threatening majority of Nigerian youths particularly, university graduates. Some graduates are putting away their certificates since they can hardly find jobs with them. They continue to write unsolicited applications to many organizations and companies but to no avail. The prevailing economic conditions and attendant staggering number of unemployed graduates' year-in-year-out has some social effects (Bulus 1998). Many people do not seem to appreciate the psychological, physical and social consequences of unemployment on the unemployed and the families, or how bleak work prospects add to their frustrations. In fact being without a job can have devastating effect on the prospects for instance, loss of self-control, insomnia, strained family relationships, domestic violence, depression, alcohol abuse and even suicide are well known reactions to job loss. These negative psychological effects of unemployment are serious and can simply be called a killer. Abbetuyi (1998), was of the view that, rising unemployment and deteriorating of local manufacturing capacity all combine to escalate crime and general insecurity of lives, business and property at a time that the country requires to attract foreign investors.

In Nigeria today, as the population grows so is the unemployment, the increasing rate of unemployment continue to be alarming and disturbing, running to over 67 million out of the 167 million people (NBS 2010). In a report of United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA): "The African Economic outlook

(2012)", Themed; *Promoting Youth Empowerment*, which was jointly published with African Development Bank (ADB); United Nations Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). That unemployment rate in Nigeria has risen from 21.1% in 2010 to 23.9% in 2012. This figure shows that one out of every four Nigerian is unemployed, the report however claimed that, Nigeria is among countries having the worst youth unemployment rate in Africa Sub-Sahara at 37.7%. Further analysis of this situation suggests that among every five Nigerian youth, two are unemployed. The situation is ever worse and more severe, the youth mainly graduates among them were the hardest hit of all the unemployed Nigerians, and more than quarter were within the range of 25 years of age, with this growing joblessness, there was also growing despondency among the youths and even their families.

Critics of this unpleasant development have suggested that unemployment in Nigeria could be averted if our tertiary institutions have tailored their programmes towards meeting the labour market needs, since providing for the needs of labour market was central in the development of such University programmes. Hence it is the workplace with its demands that held sway over programme development, lack of preparation for work also had a negative influence on the worker as well as the industry needs. Henceforth, the priority objectives will no longer be training for specific skill categories, but rather preparation of various labour force groups for successful employment. The test of appropriateness of training was no longer to be "was the skill in high and growing demand" but rather "Did individual get jobs of his or her choice and prosper in it"? The difference was a matter of emphasis. Training for successful employment was the primary goal, and meeting skills requirement was a means to that end. The central notion is the fact that employability has very little, if any, value to the individual, the community, or to the economy unless the skills that are learned enable a graduate to get and hold jobs. Graduates of HEIs must be able and willing to perform services and produce products that are in demand in the labour markets. The needs of Nigeria's labour force should dictate the programme provided by 'HEIs', preparing students for work is what employability is all about, therefore the Nigerian education policy particularly for tertiary institution, in the declaration of purpose. First should seek to provide education for gainful employment by expanding skill development programmes for specific occupations, which in more specific terms, it should include labour needs and jobs opportunities; the educational and economic needs of the people to be served; the economic characteristics of the area to be served; evaluation of the success programme participants have in employment Uwaifo (2009).

Yet perceptive studies carried out suggest employability as a means of coping with unemployment surge for those involved including the unemployed themselves, the government and 'HEIs' in particular, that produce the greater number of these employable but unemployed youth is Nigeria. There is the urgent need for the 'HEIs' to do more to respond to the alarming rate of this menace of unemployment, by providing employment opportunities to graduates of different disciplines, to mop up the army of unemployed and increasingly frustrated graduates, whose high population constitutes an economic waste and social tension that is undesirable in Nigeria social, political, economic as well as technological well-being.

## 1.6 Employability Skills: an Evolving Concept Defined

The employability skills in higher education have its origin in global trends of increasing vocationalism, mass education and labour market demand. Wendy et-al (2008), observe that, the increasing vocational role of universities has led to a concern for acceptable employability and professional outcomes for universities graduates by external stakeholders, including government and business.

While the concept employability skills in higher education is said to have series of definitions and interpretations in much of the literature available, however, there exists several conceptualisations that can be summarise at more holistic approaches, variously acknowledging labour market and personal characteristics. The definitions by McQuaid and Lindsay (2005), focus more on labour market and personal characteristics. On the other hand, Barrie (2004,2006), emphasizes on disciplinary differences, Rychen (2003), describe employability skills as placing into context, within the individuals life from the foregoing it can be deduce, that employability skills are those skills that are directly pertinent to obtaining and maintaining work. Harvey (2001); McQuaid and Lindsay (2005), argue that, employability skills can be describe as a generic and discipline specific skills required for performance in a work situation, specifically it comprises of both discipline based and generic skill, which refers to those skills necessary for an individual to develop their fullest potential in an area of study, context or workplace. Because of these numerous perceptions by different experts there appears to be considerable confusion over how employability should be defined, what these skills should look like within each discipline, how they should be taught, assessed and evaluated and how their adoption should ultimately shape teaching practices in higher education. These further, resulted in to another new call by employers, industries and business organisations such as department of science and training (DEST 2005), Australian chamber of commerce and industries (2002), and Business council of Australia (2006), for a fresh and systematic approach to developing employability skills, and inspite of all these mounting pressure to demonstrate their ability to deliver on graduate outcomes chanock et-al (2004), held the view that many universities continue to fall short on their ability to develop teaching and learning strategies that are appropriate for developing employability skills within disciplinary context and secondly, they need to provide evidence of their achievements of these out comes through the application of appropriate criteria and standards.

While scholars, experts and professionals such as Barrie (2004, 2006); chanock et al (2004), argued that lack of conceptual cleanness has stymied the employability agenda, than not with -standing, it was also argued, that there were several other factor that are found within and outside the context that have gone beyond the controls of individual institutions which also contributed to the problem. Barrie (2005, 2006); Clauchy and Ballerd (1995), and Moore (2004), have further observed that, the difficult nature of the employability in higher education agenda in terms of defining, developing, and even usability, make the concept very elusive to capture or to pin down. Hillage and Polland (1998), committee of vice-chancellors and principals [CVCP]/ Department for education and employment [DFEE] 1998), Atkins (1999), added further, that another area of confusion arises from the use of terms themselves between enterprise, "core", "key" and common, transferable and "generic". Knight (2001), regards employability as chameleon

concept, Woollard (1995), has look for employers for guidance but found that no precise definitions exists there either, which is not surprising given the range of possibilities that exists.

### **1.7 What do Labour Markets want of Higher Education?**

The question of what skills are needed to enhance labour market advantage in vying for competitive employment or simply obtaining a job depends on who is asked what and how. Some employers often opt to indicate that all they need are workers who have work conducive behaviour such as reliability, cooperativeness and the quality to follow directions. Whilst others, argue that today's increasingly technological and changing workforce, occupational skills become obsolete quickly and the emphasis should be placed on basic academic skills which are transferable and useful in bearing new learning work skills. While is it difficult not to conclude that at least some employers are looking for individuals with good work habits basic academic skills. Furthermore, it is important that the policy makers in higher education should remember that the issue now is not what additional credentials will lead to labour market advantage for their graduates; This is more in line with the argument presented by Morley (2001), who observes that, market advantage have a set of unique skills that are related to occupations that are high paying and in demand. According to him, "it is unwise to devote one's entire education to learning things that everyone else already knows (such as basic skills). One must select a vocation for which there is market demand and for which one has talent, and then pursue expertise and excellence within the niche."

From the foregoing, it becomes necessary therefore, when trying to appreciate the potential for higher education to contribute to economic well-being. It is helpful to distinguish between the formation of subject specific understanding and skills and the promotion of other valued skills, qualities and dispositions, whereas the world of employment has, by and large, been satisfied with the disciplinary understanding and skills developed by graduates, for example in the United Kingdom, the grumbles of employers about the graduates' generic skills have been longstanding, meaning to say they are less happy with what have been termed generic skills, although Hasketh (2000), provided evidence to suggest that there may be an element of discrepancies in the perceptions. Evidences have shown that there is much less evidence concerning the satisfaction of graduates regarding their preparedness for the world of work. Harvey et-al (1997), showed that employers in the U.K tended to favour generic skills more highly against disciplinary-based understanding and skills.

Whereas in the U.S.A., Reich (2002), has argued that advanced economies need two sorts of high- level expertise: one emphasizing discovering, and the other focusing on exploiting the discoveries of others through market-related intelligence and the application of interpersonal skills. Reich further emphasize that, the key contribution of higher education to the development and prosperity of a nation, lay in the development of graduates with the skills of the symbolic analyst at their disposal. This conclusively demands that undergraduate programmes should be concerned with four areas in particular i.e.:

- Abstraction
- System thinking
- Experimentation
- Collaboration

The increasing complexity and specialization of human functions in the industries and business organisation gave rise to the need for work force in occupations that require both knowledge and skill of different nature, that provide work force with the abilities required for production activity. He emphasized that the system must be reasonably geared to the production requirements of the economy in which it operates. In a nutshell, emphasis should be on through appraisal of curriculum of technical colleges to ensure the relevance of the subjects taught to the skills, knowledge and attitudes required by employer.

### **1.8 Statement of the Problem**

During the past several years, there has been an increased emphasis on the development of new and the revision of existing programme and a curriculum for higher education in Nigeria. Many researches and conferences have been conducted to identify the best strategies for development of curricula for effective preparation of graduates that are more ready for professional employment. This come as a result of the belief that traditional focus of higher institutions in Nigeria and its emphasis on disciplinary body-of-knowledge, is no longer sufficient to meet the various stakeholders need for graduate with contemporary professional employability skills.

The increasing convergence of opinion around the proposition that institutions of high learning in Nigeria must now do more for their graduates than simply teach disciplinary content, has seen the emergence of various concepts being articulated to address this aspiration, ranging from constant upgrading and overhauling of the curricula particularly at the tertiary level (Uwaifo 2009). The introduction of various skill development schemes such as Innovation Enterprise Institutions (IEIs), Vocational Enterprise Institutions (VEIs), and of recent the National Vocational and Qualification Framework (NVQF). All these were introduce to further provide graduates with clear, coherent and comprehensive training that is relevant to the needs of labour market. Even though Sumsion and Goodfellow, (2004) point out, such curriculum improvement and initiatives, has the potential to poster superficial and not very effective approach to the development of employability skills. However, some universities in Nigeria have gone further with attempts to articulate and implement various aspects of employability skills agenda initiatives. Because of these numerous initiatives and other reasons, there appears to be considerable confusion on how best could these ultimately shape teaching practices in Nigerian higher education? Consequent upon this confusion, our universities and polytechnics in Nigeria continue to fall short, especially in the quest to develop employability skills within disciplinary contexts, which also affect positive economic growth and development. Higher education failure to provide opportunities for most graduates to mobilise their skill talents learnt into successful workplace performance has led to open unemployment. With very few exceptions, the increase in labour forces reflecting high rates of population increase, are outpacing the generation of employment opportunities. This is a great tragedy of most of the developing countries such as Nigeria. The crucial question is whether appropriate opportunities

can be created through a credible employability skills initiative, for the institutions of higher learning to produce the right graduates with right skills and attitudes that matches the labour market demands?

The consensus is that the reform initiative of school curricula alone is not a sufficient to solve the problem of employability, largely the blamed has been on lack of connecting link by the acquisition of multiple disciplinary skills, between the universities and the employment market. This argument was supported by Jen, (2002), he observes that Nigerian scientist and engineers are conspicuously underutilized due to the disharmony between their educational training and the manpower needs of the labour market, this have invariably resulted in dearth of skilled manpower in Nigeria.

This raises the fundamental questions of how far and how well has higher education in Nigeria satisfied the skilled manpower demand of the labour market. It is against this background that this study intends to explore the employability skills initiative in Nigerian technical higher education.

### **1.9 Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to explore the employability skill initiatives in Nigerian tertiary institutions. The specific objectives the study are;

1. To identify the perception of employability skills by the academic staff and employers.
2. To investigate, how the employers of labour participates in course planning, design and delivery, with the aim to enhance graduate employability.
3. To explore how universities and polytechnics in Nigeria, currently develop and integrate employability skills into their training programmes, through various approaches.
4. To find out what skills employers of labour look for in a contemporary professional work ready graduate.
5. To evolve a practical model with suite of employability skills development opportunities.

### **1.10 Research Questions**

The questions for this study were initially kept broad to accommodate the requirements of both potential research methods. An exploratory approach was chosen to examine the best practice employability skills initiative in higher education. This required flexibility and open-mind to frame the research questions. By comparing qualitative research techniques, the researcher became more aware of the requirements of inductive qualitative interpretative research methods such as the need to not be biased by existing theories and research.



Hence the guiding research questions remained at high level such as;

- RQ.1. What is the perception of employability skills (ES) by the staff of tertiary institutions and the employers of labour?
- RQ.2. how does the employers of labour participate in course planning, design and delivery?
- RQ. 3. What are the ways in which academic departments engaged in developing and integrating employability skills into their training programmes?
- RQ.4. What sort of skill do the employers look for in a contemporary university/ polytechnic graduate?
- RQ.5. What are the possible ways to evolve a new model of graduate employability skill competences?

### **1.11 Significance of the Study**

One of the most critical issues facing both employers and educators at the high education level is creating balance between the supply and demand in terms of graduate employability skills that support Nigeria's economy. By its very nature, the most significant step in this direction of a study investigating best practices employability skills is that it emphasizes the role which universities play in developing human capital as part of economic development of a nation. It also provide basis for renewed interest and commitment of policy makers to repositioning the institutions especially universities and polytechnics, to produce the required skilled manpower for the labour market.

Most importantly, the study intends to capture and communicate the collective voice of experts of curriculum, employers of industries and related business organisations, on developing best practices employability skills in higher education regarding future direction. It is hoped that the outcomes will lead to establishing a common higher education programme or curricula that is work based, dynamic, explicit, in its outcomes, fully articulated, realistic, skill experience oriented. This will no doubt, encourage students to think about work-place learning more explicitly and reflectively, situating the learning within the graduates' intended profession more purposeful. This will in turn directly help students to develop a broad range of knowledge skills, attitudes and values, each of which ultimately contribute in some manner to graduate employability.

This study is therefore considered a contribution to the evolution and growth of knowledge on the linkage between higher education and workplace in Nigeria. Through this, the universities and polytechnics will identify the needs of the economy and tailor their programmes to suit those needs. With this, not only will their products be easily absorbed, they are likely to create jobs and profits from businesses established. It is therefore a forward looking resolve to create qualitative opportunities for acquiring employable skills, new competences and problem-solving skills through a focused higher education system streamlined to respond to the realities of the Nigerian situation.

In more specific terms this research study will contribute immensely;

- i. In preparing the workforce of human capital, in order to ensure that a nation's firms, its business, and industry, will have strategic advantage and be successful in global economic competition.
- ii. Best practice employability skills, if identified through this study as common learning outcomes for all students, independent of syllabus or course, can in addition provide a more effective way of enabling students to plan and pursue learning programmes which match their specific needs at given stages.
- iii. Providing an acceptable definition, goals and objectives of employability skills in relation to all programmes for higher education.
- iv. Learning approach for employability skills, also aimed at providing solution to a kind of traditional pattern of education that is seen as too theoretical and out of touch with the business realities.

### **1.12 Delimitation of the Study**

The study is delimited to the investigation of the process of developing employability skills in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Although employability skills is a global issue that goes around affecting almost every country, however, this study is relatively low in terms of coverage and did not set out to review every university's policies, procedures and practices in relation to employability skills over the world, and therefore cannot be claimed to be an exhaustive research study. Rather, it provides an overview of activity with some examples of what is considered as the processes involved in developing ES, and detailed comparative analysis on how such processes can be improved in the area of employability skills.

It should be noted, however, that the study has focus on first degree and high National Diploma training programmes in Nigerian universities and polytechnics. Whilst some of the findings of this study will have application to other high level qualification such as masters, PhD etc. In relation to employers and business, the study only consulted representations of Nigerian base firms. The study would not seek the opinion of students or new graduates, instead some brief data on the perspective of recently employed graduates will be provided. And most importantly, the limitation to the study's applicability to other situations outside Nigeria may arise from unique characteristics of Nigeria's higher education training system; such characteristics may include Nigeria's educational, economic, political, cultural and geographical uniqueness, the subjectivity and biases of the researcher.

### **1.13 Operational Definitions of Important Terms**

In this section of the study, the researcher defines terms that individuals outside this field of study may not understand and that go beyond common language (Locke, Spirduso & Silverman, 2007). The rationale is to add precision on the use of language and terms as the case may be.

**Technical Higher Education:** - Education offered at the tertiary level which requires some manipulative skills and the application of technical knowledge in a particular occupation or profession.

**Employability:** - being used as a set of knowledge based skills, understanding and personal attributes that make an individual likely to choose and secure occupations in which they can be satisfied and successful (Dacrepool & Swell, 2007)

**Higher Education:** - Education being offered at the post-secondary school level in Nigeria through various institutions of higher learning, such as Universities and Polytechnics.

**Universities:** - are institutions of higher learning in Nigeria, perched on top of the pyramid of an educational system, established to train and produce skill personnel and professionals necessary for executing the nation's development plans, goals and strategies. They have being in the fore- front of skill manpower production in Nigeria. They offer degree and higher programme of various occupational professions.

**Polytechnics:** - are those institutions of higher learning in Nigeria which offer multi-post- secondary technical education programmes. They are established primarily for development of skill knowledge and attitudes to enable graduates to function as competent technicians and technologists in relevant employment; they offer two-year course of study learning to the award of National Diploma (ND) at the initial stage and another two-year course learning to Higher Diploma (HND).

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## BIODATA OF STUDENT

The student is a chief lecturer, a researcher and a consultant at Waziri Umaru Federal Polytechnic Birnin-Kebbi, Nigeria, with nearly 28 years of working experience. He has a Bachelor degree in Technical Education and a Masters degree in Industrial Education from Ahmadu Bello University Zaria Nigeria, and University of Nigeria Nsukka respectively. He was a Head of Department of Industrial Education, a Dean of School of Vocational and Technical Education and a Director, Consultancy Service Unit at Waziri Umaru Federal Polytechnic Birnin-Kebbi Nigeria. The student attended many conferences both at National and International levels as a resource person/participant, He also published several articles in journals of national and international repute. His areas of interest includes among others research and development, creativeness, innovativeness and sports.



## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

- Rufai, A. U., Bakar, A. B., Rashid, A. M. Business, Industry and Higher Education Collaboration: A Panacea in Developing Professional Work-Ready Graduates. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, [S.l.], v. 6, n. 6, p. 512, Nov. 2015. ISSN 2039-2117.
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- Rufai, A. U., Bakar, A. B., Rashid, A. M. Rethinking Higher Education Curricula and Training Policy in Fostering Graduate Employability Skills. Submitted to the *International Education Studies*.



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