



# APPRAISING THE EMPLOYABILITY AND ADAPTABILITY OF PRIVATE UNIVERSITY GRADUATES IN THE NIGERIAN LABOUR MARKET

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**ABSTRACT:** *The restoration of democracy in Nigeria has brought tremendous improvements to many sectors of the nation's economy. The liberalization of the educational sector is one of the major breakthroughs recorded in the country since the return of democracy. With the privatization of education, the number of private polytechnics and universities have grown in leaps and bounds. In spite, expectations have not been adequately met in relevant literature when it comes to appraising the entrance of private investors in the nation's university educational sector particularly as it affects meaningfully contributing to national growth and development. This limitation led to this study which was primarily designed to appraise the employability and adaptability of products of private universities graduates in selected organizations in Lagos State. Survey Research design and key informant interview was adopted for the study. A total of 80 human resources managers and gainfully employed graduates of private universities were purposively and conveniently selected. Findings revealed that graduates of private universities compete favourably with their counterparts from public institutions even though some of the graduates fall short of expectation in terms of connection between grades obtained and the practical world. It was therefore concluded that private university education can be improved by deliberate and continuous move to bridge the classroom-industry gap.*

**Keywords:** *Education, private universities, employers of labour, educational standard*

## Introduction

There is no doubt that a nation's educational landscape will have some impact on its economic system and fortunes in terms of industrial growth and development. The demand of a developing and highly industrialized nation especially with the advancement in technology has made the educational system a major focus for stakeholders. This is borne out of the fact that the occupational demands of captains of industries and the society at large is hinged on the content of educational deliverables. It can therefore be safely argued that the educational system produces the man power of the nation, who engage in economic activities to produce the wealth of the nation, and this is a pointer to the

level of investment that can further be made in economic activities and in the educational sector (Okugadu 1991).

It is no longer news that private universities have come to stay in Nigeria and recent happenings have shown that private investors are capable of contributing meaningfully to the education landscape within and outside the country.

There have been positive changes in the education sector since the return of democracy in Nigeria. A major significant change is the decision to privatise tertiary education nationwide. The Federal Government of Nigeria and the National University Commission in 1999 liberalized the ownership of Nigerian



University thus giving birth to private university ownership in Nigeria.

Consequently, there has been a significant increase in the number of private universities and polytechnics in the last few years. This study is particularly interested in the impact of graduates of the growing private universities on the nation's national and economic development.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Even with the privatization of education in Nigeria, serious doubts remain and questions are still being asked daily on the usefulness or otherwise of private Universities in Nigeria. There are growing concerns expressed by employers of labour that most Nigerian graduates are not properly taught thereby needing a lot of training in the labour market. Private Universities such as Afe Babalola University emerged to salvage the situation bearing in mind the fact that education remains the engine that drives the growth and development of a nation. Although there are a number of earlier researches on private university education in Nigeria, the studies majorly focused on the emergence of private investors in the nation's educational sector. Few, if any of the studies examined the employability as well as the application of the knowledge gathered by graduates of private institutions in the labour market. In view of this, this research work intends to fill this gap in literature. Therefore, the focal point of this study is to appraise the employability and adaptability of graduates of private universities in the labour market as well as recommendation of human resources managers on how to improve private university education in Nigeria.

To this end, the following research questions were raised to provide direction for the study.

### **Research Questions**

1. Are private universities graduates employed by employers of labour?
2. What is the assessment of employers of labour on the performance and adaptability of graduates of private universities in the work place?
3. Do graduates of private universities perform to expectation vis-à-vis grades obtained from their schools?
4. How can private university education be improved in Nigeria?

### **Objectives of the Study**

The general objective of the study is to appraise the employability and adaptability of Nigeria's private universities' graduates in the labour market.

Other specific objectives include:

- To know whether private universities graduates are being discriminated by employers of labour.
- To find out the assessment of employers of labour on the performance and adaptability of private university graduates in the work place.
- To establish whether graduates of private universities perform to expectation vis-à-vis grades obtained from their schools.
- To explore how private university education can be improved in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Excursion**

#### **Defining Education**

Like every concept under the heavens, education is seen and defined from different perspectives. People usually say the word education implies that something valuable has been accomplished academically.

Education therefore can be defined as the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and habits or simply as the process of facilitating learning by way of storytelling, teaching, discussion, research and training. Education consist of various courses of instruction aimed at equipping recipients with the attitudes, tools, skills, ideas, values and understanding necessary for optimum and effective performance of roles in the labour market.

Educational institutions are the various platforms by which people are given instructions on best practices about a given course of study thereby strengthening and empowering the mental faculty of the people. Formal education can be described as the method of education that follows well defined structures and prescribed methods through which learning is facilitated for a specified number of years, time or duration (Dada 1986). Formal education starts from pre-school or kindergarten, primary, secondary and then tertiary education. University or tertiary education, which is the focus of this work is the highest educational institution all over the world with the primary aim of teaching and training young men and women for various professions and disciplines such as engineering, law, science and technology, medicine, applied sciences and so on.



Education all over the world has two forms of control; it could be centralized or decentralized. Centralized control involves sole government ownership and control of educational institutions in such a country while decentralized implies that private business men and other associations can also establish and operate educational institutions by applying for operating license from the government or regulatory body. It is believed in certain quarters that the system of educational control either centralized, decentralized or concurrent is usually politically monitored. Nigeria seems to practice decentralized educational control and that is why the Nigerian university commission was instituted by the Federal government to oversee the sector. As at today, the federal government through NUC dictates the overall direction in terms of content and operational forms of the educational sector whether public or private.

#### **Emergence of Private Universities in Nigeria**

With the liberalization of the education sector in Nigeria by the Federal government since the 90s, Private Universities have come to stay in Nigeria. By implication, this involves active involvement of any interested individual or corporate establishments in the ownership and control of education thereby addressing some of the institutional inadequacies of public universities such as incessant strikes, delayed/elongated academic calendar and cultism amongst others. The involvement of private practitioners in education in Nigeria has helped in no small measures to correct certain inadequacies in tertiary education in Nigeria. Private institutions have helped to restore the confidence of Nigerians through: stable academic calendar (there are some private universities that do not observe public holidays and labour industrial actions), provision of admissions to increasing number of applicants seeking placements on yearly basis, restoring and sustaining quality, producing students that are globally competitive as most of the graduates compete favourably globally amongst others.

Highlighting the rationale for private universities establishment, Okoro and Okoro (2014: 190) citing Okebukola (2002) and NUC (2004) said the establishment of private tertiary institutions is justifiable because of the numerous benefits accrued to it. Some of its benefits are:

**Raise Alternative Ways of Funding the University:** Apart from the poor quality of graduates, as a result of poor physical facilities in the federal and state universities, another reason for

the involvement of private hands in the provision and maintenance of university education is the underfunding of the education sector. Over the years, this problem has been generating a lot of strife between the Academic Staff Union of Universities and the government. However, the presence of private hands in university education is considered an alternative means of funding university education in the country.

**Improve the Quality of University Education:** The government is of the view that the growth of private universities in the country will allow for competition between the public and the private universities, in terms of instructional delivery and other activities put in place to produce quality graduates for the economy. Competition brings improved quality of educational inputs and outputs.

**Provision of Enough and Adequate Teaching and Learning Materials:** Most universities in the country have consistently inadequate resources, which invariably affects the quality of output they produce. The universities in Nigeria operate in adverse conditions; overcrowding and deteriorating physical facilities, lack of library books, educational materials and so on. Addressing this problem calls for the involvement of the private sector.

**Enhance Efficiency:** Internal efficiency in terms of graduating students at record time with very few or no drop-out at all and external efficiency in terms of producing what the market would absorb on graduation to reduce to the barest minimum or eliminate unemployment. Also with more players in the university system, there would be more rational and efficient allocation of resources in the short term. The long-term effect is to stabilise the cost of operation, with an attendant increase in, and improved quality of production. These among others could be responsible for granting of operating license to private universities in Nigeria by NUC.

Private higher education ownership had long been practiced in some countries like the United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada, Germany Japan and the Philippines.

Okoro and Okoro (2014) citing Varghese (2004) claimed that Kenya blazed the trail in the establishment of private higher education institutions in Africa followed by Benin Republic, Senegal, Tanzania, Uganda, Ghana, Mozambique, Cameroon and so on.



Going down memory lane, Nigeria’s establishment of private higher education has evolved during two historic phases: the first was during the second republic under President Shehu Shagari administration 1979 – 1983 and the second was during the fourth republic under President Olusegun Obasanjo. Some private individual made bold move to establish private universities.

Hence, according to Okwori & Okwori, (2007) in Okoro and Okoro (2014) the legitimatization of private universities in

Here is a comprehensive list of the current approved private Universities in Nigeria:

Nigeria was due to the famous Supreme Court decision in favour of Dr. Basil Ukaegbu, the proprietor of the Imo State Technical University in a case against the Imo State Government that had declared the institution illegal. This singular Supreme Court judgment brought about the establishment of private higher institutions in Nigeria. As at 2017, the number of private universities had risen to about sixty one.

PRIVATE UNIVERSITIES IN NIGERIA – APPROVED BY NUC		
S/N	PRIVATE INSTITUTION	YEAR OF ESTABLISHMENT
1.	Babcock University, Ilishan Remo	1999
2.	Madonna University, Okija	1999
3.	Igbinedion University, Okada	1999
4.	Bowen University, Iwo	2001
5.	Convenant University, Ota	2002
6.	Pan-Atlantic University, Lagos	2002
7.	Benson Idahosa University, Benin City	2002
8.	American University of Nigeria, Yola	2003
9.	Redeemers University, Ede, Osun State	2005
10.	Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo	2005
11.	Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin	2005
12.	Caritas University, Amorji-Nke, Enugu	2005
13.	CETEP City University, Lagos	2005
14.	Bingham University, Auta-Balefi, Karu, Nasarawa state	2005
15.	Al-Qalam University, Katsina	2005
16.	Renaissance University, Enugu	2005
17.	Bells University of Technology, Ota, Ogun State	2005
18.	Leads City University, Ibadan, Oyo State	2005
19.	Crawford University, Igbesa, Ogun State	2005
20.	Kwararafa University, Wukari (formerly Wukari Jubilee University)	2005
21.	Crescent University, Abeokuta	2005
22.	Novena University, Ogume, Delta State	2005
23.	Universiity of Mkar, Mkar	2005
24.	Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Ikeja-Arakeji, Osun State	2006
25.	Caleb University, Lagos	2007
26.	Fountain University, Osogbo	2007
27.	Obong University, Obong Ntak	2007
28.	Salem University, Lokoja	2007



29.	Tansian University, Umunya, Anambra State	2007
30.	Veritas University, Abuja	2007
31.	Wesley University of Science & Technology, Ondo	2007
32.	Western Delta University, Oghara, Delta State	2007
33.	The Achievers University, Owo	2007
34.	African University of Science & Technology, Abuja	2007
35.	Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State	2009
36.	Godfrey Okoye University, Ugwuoma-Nike, Enugu State	2009
37.	Nigerian Turkish Nile University, Abuja	2009
38.	Oduduwa University, Ipetumodu, Osun State	2009
39.	Paul University, Awka, Anambra State	2009
40.	Rhema University, Obeama-Asa, River state	2009
41.	Wellspring University, Evbuobanosa, Edo State	2009
42.	Adeleke University, Ede, Osun State	2011
43.	Baze University, Abuja	2011
44.	Landmark University, Omu-Aran, Kwara State	2011
45.	Samuel Adegboyega University, Ogwa, Edo State	2011
46.	Elizade University, Ilara-Mokin, Ondo State	2012
47.	Evangel University, Akaeze, Ebonyi State	2012
48.	Gregory University, Uturu, Abia State	2012
49.	McPherson University, Seriki Sotayo, Ajebo, Ogun State	2012
50.	Southwestern University, Okun Owa, Ogun State	2012
51.	Augustine University, Ilara, Lagos state	2015
52.	Chrisland University, Owode, Ogun State	2015
53.	Christopher University, Mowe, Ogun State	2015
54.	Hallmark University, Ijebu, Itele, Ogun State	2015
55.	Kings University, Ode Omu, Osun State	2015
56.	Michael and Cecilia Ibru University, Owrode, Delta State	2015
57.	Mountain Top University, Ogun State	2015
58.	Ritman University, Ikot Ekpene, Akwa Ibom State	2015
59.	Summit University, Offa, Kwara State	2015
60.	Edwin Clark University, Kiagbodo, Delta state	2015
61.	Hezekiah University, Umudi,, Imo State	

Source: [www.goodbooksafrica.com](http://www.goodbooksafrica.com) retrieved 07/07/17

#### Of Education and Knowledge Application

An educated person can boast of his education only if he can apply such education to a real life situation especially in the practical working environment. As such, there should be

synergic alliance between education and knowledge application.

This goes to say that paper qualifications are just a waste of time and resources if for instance a first class candidate fails in practical applications of what he or she learnt in school.

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To be educated means that an individual has acquired the physical, mental, moral and social capacities demanded of him by a group or society into which he is born and within which he must function.

Over what constitute knowledge, people often differ, though there will always be a common ground of convergence. In philosophy, there had been two main but opposing views on the nature of knowledge. One perspective says people can only have knowledge when individuals allow their reasoning to work on its own. The other perspective took the opposite position. Modern Philosophers who keyed into the second perspective argue that the only source of knowledge is experience which is acquired through the use of human senses. Science for example, and its various branches, constitutes this knowledge (Berenson et.al. (1976:60).

Contemporary, writings and researches on education and knowledge application still demand closer examination and clarification particularly as it affects private universities' graduates. It is in view of this that the researcher examined the topic of inquiry.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

Opinions differ on what constitutes knowledge and its application across the globe. Psychologists, social scientist theorists and scholars' interest therefore lies on discussing and measuring how people are able to apply their education to practical situations.

There are two schools of thoughts in scholarly discipline of education and learning. The school that may be considered the earliest between these two thoughts is the work of the German Gestalt psychologists such as Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka and Wolfgang Kohler of 1914. Kohler proved that learning takes cognizance of the total or whole situation through insight which is characterized by cognitive organization or restructuring and a sudden perception which comes in a flash (Denga 1988:65). The Gestalt psychologists hold the view that reorganization and restructuring of the psychological environment is very important for a total understanding of a particular problem to be solved in a given situation. Supporting the Gestalt psychologists, Travers (1965) in Denga (1988) states that all events in nature happen within some field and therefore it is the totality of the field, its properties and structure, that explain all events transpiring within the field. As such, he posits that an individual cannot be well

understood until his/her background is thoroughly comprehended.

The second school of thought in learning and education that gives credence to this study is the Field's Theory of Insight or Perceptual process of learning. Field emphasizes problem solving. To Field, knowledge should be graded in hierarchical way to enable learners obtain some partial insight of the problem before they eventually figure out the total solution. The Field's theory takes into account factors such as motivation, maturation of students, experience / background of the learner, the learner's intelligence level and interest. Besides, apart from Field's theory's emphasis on problem-solving, creative thinking, structure or organization and meaning, he opined that conscious effort must be geared towards ensuring that students are taught the unity, meaning and relatedness of the course of study in practical sense so that they can fit into the larger society and the labour market after graduation (Denga 1988).

In summary, from the perspectives expressed above, learning and infact education and its application seems to be extremely controversial, complex and full of diverse interpretations and derivations. The important thing is to be able to decipher from the various theoretical formulations the extent to which one can link formal education, the learning process and the practicability of the course of study when students get employed.

#### **Study Population**

Human Resources Managers and gainfully employed graduates of Private universities totaling 80 constituted the population of this study. The respondents were a blend of people from different sectors of the economy namely: Eterna oil and Gas, PTV tidings, Bristow helicopters, Pan African Airline, Punch Newspaper all based in Lagos.

#### **Methodology**

To unravel the raised research questions, the researcher used survey method to extract information from respondents drawn from aviation, oil and gas, media, information Technology and Telecommunications sectors using the purposive sampling technique.

Specifically, key informant interview was used. A six-item structured interview guide was used to gather data from human resources executives and some employees of the selected organizations who are graduates of private universities.



### Discussion of Findings

**Research Question One:** As an introduction, a question was raised to establish the employability of products of private universities by employers of labour in Nigeria. When the Human resources managers of the companies under the study were asked whether or not they employ graduates of private universities, all of them disclosed that indeed, they do not discriminate against private universities students either for industrial attachment or for proper employment. To them, it is a level playing ground for both public and private institutions. In addition, some of the respondents are employees of the selected corporate establishments under review and former students of private universities. Specifically, some employees of The Punch Newspapers who are graduates of private universities hinted that their employment was based on connection with top managers in the organizations, more of referral but were however quick to add that they were still subjected to entrance aptitude test and interview with other applicants before their employments.

**Research Question Two:** The question sought to know the assessment of employers of labour on the performance and adaptability of graduates of private universities in the work place? The respondents all disclosed that their private universities employees are not doing badly in their various employments. One of the respondents, Mr Bolaji Ajiboye of PTV tidings however said the portfolio of some of the company's private universities employees in the first couple of years are limited. He added that they are only good at the supervisory level as most of them cannot take up initiatives on their own. They perform better when they are supervised by someone as they are better off at taking instructions. He hinted that they tend to be good at data and information technology processing and imputing than the practical world of marketing and other related fields. This finding is in tandem with Field's theory of insight or perceptual process of learning which takes into account factors such as motivation, maturation of students, experience / background of the learner, the learner's intelligence level and interest (Denga 1988). Ajiboye added that some of the company's private universities employees are "brilliant but not too smart or sharp". Another respondent in the aviation sector lamented that as an HR person, he has observed that some of the company's employees who are private universities graduates are restless because they change job frequently due of the salary

structure that his establishment offer them. Some of them, he added, want higher salaries from the first month of being hired. Thinking for the employees, he said this may be because of the high school fees they have paid while in school and also the investments their parents have made on them. Reacting to this, when the researcher asked some of the employees why they want higher salaries from the first month of employment, their responses were quite revealing. Some of them said they need to be adequately motivated to be loyal to the company and that they would gladly leave the company as soon as they get better salary offer.

**Research Question Three:** The respondents were asked whether or not graduates of private universities perform to expectation vis-à-vis grades obtained from their schools. Opinions differ on this as about 55 percent of the respondents said that their private universities employees perform up and sometimes more than expectation. It was gathered that a good number of such employees graduated with first class and second class upper positions. They hinged the increasing number of graduates with first class and second class upper grades in private universities on the use of and advances in knowledge and access to information through the internet. When asked about the impact of the internet in making academic resource more accessible to students, the 55 per cent of the respondents who shared similar opinion opine that information communication technology has contributed immensely to the rise of first class graduates. For instance, Mr. Jimoh Tola of Injoo Phones asserted that there are increasing number of serious-minded students who deploy information communication technology to achieve good grades and results.

In spite of the satisfaction expressed by some of the human resource managers interviewed on the reflection of the grades obtained on work maneuvers of some of the private universities graduates, specifically, 45 percent of the human resources personnel differ in their opinion by stressing that their experiences with some of the so called First Class or Second class upper graduates usually do not exhibit such brilliance when handling tasks / certain job functions in the work place. One of the respondents, Mrs Bunmi Odu of Eterna plc who admitted that some of the private universities graduates are geniuses however said in spite of graduating with brilliant results and grades, some of her company's private university graduates are not so smart



and sharp as some of them are still too young to fit into the labour market perfectly. She opines that education should be sound and able to equip students with relevant hard and soft skills needed for them to meaningfully contribute their quota to national growth. In view of this, she advised the private investors to include in their academic curriculum initiatives that will cater for the social, psychological and emotional wellbeing of students thereby making them ready and valuable for personal and national development.

Also, Mr Akinbo of Bristow Helicopters and quite a number of the human resources manager under study still feel that it is almost impossible for private universities to produce large numbers of first class graduates with the dwindling academic commitments on the part of the students and other service providers. They further argue that for them, they have decided to de-emphasize first class or second class upper grades as prerequisites to employment as it appears Nigerian degrees are becoming a mockery. Rather, the HR managers with dissenting views said they also employ graduates with lower grades who have got something valuable to offer their organisations.

**Research Question Four:** As employers of labour who are also stakeholders in the education sector, the HR managers were asked to suggest how private university education can be improved in Nigeria. The suggestions proffered were quite insightful. Majority of the interviewees clamoured for the need for university/industry partnership in developing new curricula and in reviewing existing ones in line with current trends in the private sector. They advised that deliberate effort should be made to bridge the widening gap between the industry and what is being taught in the classrooms. Furthermore, development of entrepreneurial skills in undergraduates by ensuring that for each programme or course, the university is be able to build in some entrepreneurial components in the curricular. Work-Study programme should also be a component of private education, if possible right from the secondary school.

Moreover, they advocated that private universities lecturers who do not have industry experience in the courses they teach should also be encouraged to undergo some industry based trainings periodically. This, they opine would enable them to have full grasp of the course in practical terms other than the theory and garbage in garbage out approach.

#### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

It is not debatable that it is the educational system that produces the leaders and managers of a nation's economy. As such, the type of orientation or educational training given to the younger generation would determine the kind of development that the nation's economy will witness. An expanding economy like Nigeria's, with emergent complex skills in commerce, engineering, science, technology, accountancy, administration and so on, will definitely impose special demands on the educational system to produce man power at both theoretical and practical levels to man its economy.

The study revealed that there is no discrimination against graduates of private universities by captains of industries and human resources managers. However opinions differ on the performances of private universities employees. Some of the HR managers interviewed said they are not doing badly while some others felt their company's private universities' employees were not performing up to expectation vis-a vis the grades obtained from their institutions.

Based on facts gathered from the study, it is recommended that private university authorities should partner with employers of labour with approval by the NUC to review the school curriculum to suit demands of the labour market. This will enrich the content of courses that will be taught in the school and ultimately make private institutions graduates fit into the workforce properly with little or no training and supervision.

In addition, to enhance the delivery systems, concerted efforts must be made to allow lecturers in private universities who are deficient in industry or field experience undergo trainings periodically. Such lecturers can work on part time basis during long vacation or sabbatical in related organizations that offer such services.

Furthermore, students should be encouraged to continuously add value to themselves in addition to classroom education to leverage their competitiveness globally.

Employers of labour are also advised to set good salary structures in order to motivate and get the best out of their staff.

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