

Enhancing Curriculum Quality Assurance as a Prerequisite to Higher Education Graduate's Employability

Fossimock B. Tendongmoh

Faculty of Science of Education (FSE), University of Yaounde I, Yaounder-Cameroon

Abstract:-The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how curriculum quality assurance can improve Higher Education (HE) graduate's employability. The state and individuals spend colossal sums yearly to educate citizens, upon graduation; they hardly procure or create jobs. This demise has plunged the youths into theft, cyber criminality, migration, hopelessness, disillusionment and misery. This work therefore stands to ascertain the relationship between curriculum quality assurance and HE graduates employability. Our population was made up of graduates from the University of Yaoundé I and through a homogenous sampling technique; we had a sample population of 203 students and 23 employers. Questionnaires were used for data collection. Data was analysed using cross-tabulation analysis through SPSS statistical tool. Our main findings were: curriculum quality assurance improves graduates' employability 92.6%, 91.1% employers are never invited during curriculum conception, 74.3% people are dissatisfied with the present curriculum, 76.5% people confirmed that the absence of employers from curriculum conception kills graduates employability, among others. Based on these, we recommend that; experts should prioritise the socio-political and economic state of our society during curriculum conception, modify the present curriculum and involve economic operators. Encourage internship, ensure syllable is drawn from the curriculum, Evaluate teacher's quality program coverage. Curriculum quality enhancement is the brain-child behind knowledge, skills, competences and abilities possess by the graduates which facilitate employability and boost Economic growth.

Key Words: Curriculum, Quality, Assurance, Prerequisite, Employability, Graduates

I. INTRODUCTION

The primary aim of higher education is invariably to acquire knowledge and skills that prepare graduates to create or acquire jobs and be effective at work, Gakuladas (2012). This will not only save graduates from unemployment crises but will also improve the standard of living, increase economic growth and place the educational system on the international standard. Unfortunately, the reverse is mostly true in most societies especially the developing countries. The present African unemployment rate is about 10.8% and that of Cameroon has increased from 4.1% in 2014 to 4.51% in 2017 (International Labour Organisation, 2017). In Cameroon, according to National Employment Fund (2017), unemployment rate in the city of Yaoundé is 14.7% and

12.5% in Douala. This percentage has gone through higher education, spending hard earned money and time. Today, they are reduced to cyber criminals, drug addicts, gamblers, disappointment to their families and the society because upon graduation, they cannot make a change.

Despite Cameroon government relentless endeavour to contend graduate's unemployment via the creation National Employment Fund (NEF) of 2006, The Support Programme for Rural and Urban Youths (PAJE-U), initiated in 2007, The programme for the fabrication of sporting material, initiated in 2007, and many others, the rate of unemployed graduates keep rising. The main factors propagating this lack in graduates' economic insertion seem to originate from the low curriculum quality and assurance mechanism. It is probably theoretical and/or mismatches with the possible available job exigencies. Meanwhile the linkage between the University curriculum and world of work or employers is vital in assuring graduate's employability. It must be noted that the notion of employability is based on two main axis; *employ* and *ability* which designates acquiring the job as a person and having the ability (skills) respectively to perform your task to meet with the exigencies of the employer. Today, the Cameroon higher education and most especially the University of Yaoundé I through its curriculum is poised to ameliorate the school-to-job-market embarrassment which most graduates have previously been subjected to. The accomplishment of this laudable higher institutional objective hinges on quality assurance strategies expected to be used by quality assurance personnel in the various QA cells established in all universities as per the Cameroon University standard (2015, p.25) which can be experienced both internally (internal quality Assurance, IQA). This is most vital in the building of learners towards employments and the institution towards the national accreditation evaluation from the Ministry of higher education (MINESUP)

The notion of quality Assurance (QA) has relative considerations and every educational system appreciates it with respect to its societal needs and funding abilities. Therefore, we delineate our study of Curriculum Quality assurance (CQA) and graduates employability to Cameroon context, where debates on the role of curriculum on graduate's employability are at the center stage in the Universities today.

In this view, we shall look at specific elements that maintain QA in our curriculum for it complete fitness of purpose. Such tools like the teaching-learning process, assessment, student – teacher ratio, academic resources, the content of learning and the level of achievement in terms of outcomes and the graduate’s employment rate (Materu, 2007, p. 7).

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section examines related works of different authors who express their views on curriculum quality assurance and graduate’s employability.

Curriculum for employability

H.E is probably the gate way for employment world wide. Its systems are therefore steered to stress on the employability of graduates. This objective is being pursued by increasing the professional content of traditional programs, revising and renewing curricula and linking HE to professional world (Samfoga Doh, 2015) as cited in Samfoga (2016). Machado (2008, p. 16) states that ; *Le curriculum s’incrive dans les realites sociales, culturelles, economiques, ethiques et sociales des régions et des pays dans lesquelles ils sont amenés a orienter le systeme, un curriculum ne porte pas, ils se construit localement.* Therefore, curriculum experts of a country are never imported, the curriculum is conceived locally. According to the Georgian University (2015 : 4) *curriculum should deliver relevant programs of exceptional qualities. The quality of our programs is dependent on systematic quality assurance processes for academic program development, review and renewal.* Curriculum can as well be defined broadly as the totality of graduate’s experiences that occur in the educational process. In this light, the school curriculum becomes an indispensable tool through which the system can objectively train the students in preparation for the job market.

According to the Association for the Development of Africa (ADA) (2008, p.122), curriculum is “a political and technical processes that express and reflects the values, attitudes and feelings of a society towards its own well-being and development”. Here, it is portrayed as a means that permits the educational system to adapt to the needs of the society at a given time. In the Cameroon context, professionalisation is viewed as a strategy to adapt curriculum and its related pedagogical (teaching and learning) to socioprofessional needs and applicability (Doh 2012, p.123). This makes a varied way of professionalisation of education as opposed to Samfoga (2002) where curricula in the most departments of the University of Yaoundé I was more theory oriented couple with the disparity between these subjects and the employer’s interest. Meaning that the professionalisation process in Cameroon H.E is making significant moves and could be even more significant once curriculum quality is assured.

Curriculum for employability must be tailored to different needs and strategies such as flexible time frame for

work completion, differentiation of tasks, flexibility for teachers, time for additional support and emphasis on vocational as well as academic goals can be useful (UNESCO, 2005). The present state of affairs call for the revision of the program with the hope of rendering them more professional in order to meet up with the country’s economic needs and to enable a harmonious socio-economic integration from the product of the educational system, (The Sector Wide Approach, 2005).

Curriculum internal quality assurance review

Internal quality assurance is a more complex phenomenon that is embedded in educational processes. That is why Kahsay (2012) as cited by UNESCO (2018), in his review quoted prominent higher education experts and their views in defining quality assurance; Pfeffer and Coot, (1991) says it is slippery, Baird (1998), Harvey and Green 1993, Middlehurst, 1992, Westerheijden (1990) described it as slippery, Boyle and Bowden, (1997) say it is dynamic while Campbell and Rozsnyai (2002) think it is multidimensional. All these scholars believed it was hard to assure a curriculum. They were not however far from the point, but looking at curriculum quality assurance from a relative view point it is more fitting to the purpose for which it is essentially for at a given time. This is why a single University can put the mechanisms together and assure the quality of its curriculum without affecting other institutions. Here, her customers (employers) will be satisfied and graduates interest fulfilled.

According to Brennan & Shah (2000) as cited in UNESCO (2018, p.79), IQA can have an academic, managerial, pedagogic or employment focus. The above areas are suitable for curriculum implementation with focus on improving graduates ability. In this wise, Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2005) affirm that the dominant approach currently emphasises the quality of student learning and IQA would have a prime purpose of enriching the learning experience of students. This marches with the view we are sharing in this area. Curriculum cannot function in isolation.

Quality in higher education could be complex but will remain the underpinning force behind graduate’s employability. Countries aspiring to professionalise higher education and concretely solve the unemployment crises have devised a means to interpret and tailor quality to suit the taste of her higher education and society. It is from this perspective that quality assurance in Cameroon higher education is viewed here as an indispensable brainchild behind graduate’s employability.

Employability

According to Yorke (2006), employability is a set of achievements-skills, understanding and personal attributes that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their occupation which benefits themselves, the work force, the community and the economy. According to the European Commission (2014), employability can be

approached from both demand and supply side of HE where the demand side approach emphasises on of Higher Education Institution in responding to labour market demands. While the supply side is based on their role in producing employable graduates.

As we strive to unmask the difficulties limiting graduates from getting employment or creating one from the program studied in school, emphasis must be layed on the prominence of quality assurance. UNESCO (2018) holds that;

IQA is primarily concern with enhancement of academic quality, it also has the potentials to establish necessary linkage between academia and the labour market. Indeed procedures linked to the quality assurance of academic programmes are very commonly concerned with the question of whether or not a program is sufficiently aligned with the competencies needed in the labour market, UNESCO (2018, p. 24)

From the above view, quality assurance is undoubtedly a vital mechanism through which a skill-based curriculum can achieve its objectives. It creates a visible linkage between the school program and the job market. And for the procedures that will build this linkage include mostly via teaching-learning, thereby inculcating the qualities and skills in the learners.

Theoretical review

Many researchers in the field of education have mostly exploited the three theories used in this study. There are, the Human Capital Theory (H.C.T) of 1974 by Becker, the Signalling Theory (S.T) of 1899 by Deikmann and the Cost Benefits Theory (C.B.T) of 1982 by Jean Dreze and Nicholas Stern. Becker in this theory states that the economic value of a people is based on their health and educational achievements, skills and knowledge. He added that people invest in education to improve the quality of the workers and intern improves the community.

According to Tafah et al. (2012), human capital measured by education and health impacts significantly and positively on economic growth. In this analysis, they showed that in a long run, 0.1 change in primary and secondary school enrolments will leads respectively to 0.7% and 0.39% in the growth of gross domestic products (GDP), the same way, a 1% change in life expectancy is expected to lead on average on a variation of 1.12% of growth. Considering the above statistics and the fact that H.C is still very limited in Cameroon, Tafah and others argue that it is an important source of growth and the authority needs to adopt policies to develop H.C in order to achieve the growing ambition of the country. This therefore draws us to the need for improvement in curriculum's quality that will inculcate the needed skills thereby making the graduates valuable for the job market.

According to Schultz(1960), H.C consist the accumulation of all prior investment in education, on the job training, health, migration and other factors that increase individuals productivity and therefore earnings. These knowledge and skills are in great part the product of investment and combined with other human investments to make a people productive in all dimensions. Amin A.A. and Awund A.W. (2005) used the HCT in a study titled *Economic analysis of Private Returns in Private Investment in Education in Cameroon*. Their full application of HCT in this study confirmed that people moved from less paid jobs to more paid ones as the productivity increases. Invariably, this movement is possible through education. Cameroon is in dire need of healthy skilled workers to boost economic growth in order to be able to meet the millennium development goals and of realizing its dreams of becoming an emerging economy by 2035 Tefah et al. (2012). Therefore, H.C.T becomes vital tool for these dreams to be realized. Knight, & Yorke(2014) affirmed that the development of employability in graduates has become a significant expectation that governments around the world have to varying extend impose on national higher education systems.

The Cost Benefit Theory is also applicable in curriculum and employability. It is an economic investment theory which means calculating the cost of education, estimating the benefits from education and comparing the benefits with the cost to obtain the return expected. It is from this type of calculations that decisions are made on the type of curriculum and allocations of resources for its enhancement. The purpose of this theory is to provide a consistent procedure for evaluating decisions in terms of their consequences, Andreze& Tern, (1982). The two basic ingredients of the cost benefit analysis are the ability to predict consequences (A model) and the willingness to evaluate them (an objective function). According to Mbua(2002; p.52), cost benefit theory is the system comparison of magnitude of the cost and benefit of some form of investment in order to assess its economic profitability. It is also called the rates of return analysis. It is used to determine the choice of the investment project in order for their benefit per unit cost.

The Signalling Theory plays a specific role in this study. According to this theory, one party (the agent) credibly conveys some information about himself/herself such as; the type of skills needed, the quantity and quality of personnel's, to another party (the principal) who organizes the training system towards those specifications. This reduction in information asymmetry between the employers needs and the program studied in school is pivotal as it will unite the curriculum experts and the employers to conceive the curriculum thereby setting a platform for objective training. The graduates will be embedded with current skills and abilities which employers need thus they will be employed. Michael Spence applied this theory on education as job market signalling model (JMSM). According to him, potential employees send signals about their abilities, competencies and

levels to the employer through their education credentials. This could be realistic in developed countries or to Faculties with practical skill-based curricula.

III. METHODOLOGY

This part of the study treats research design, population of study, the sample and sampling techniques, instruments used for data collection, techniques of data analysis, presents main findings, results, recommendations and conclusion.

Research Design

This study was carried out using the cross-sectional research approach. This research method was used in order to enable the researcher to compare the experiences, views and characteristics of different groups of people with the same feature involve in the situation. It was this research design that enabled the researcher to describe the state of affairs of the social phenomenon by establishing relationship between variable, collecting data and verifying hypothesis to either confirm or deny their opinions on the state of affairs prescribed.

Target Population

The population of this study consisted of graduates from the University of Yaoundé I and employers. This population was suitable for this study because this research work is aimed at investigating how curriculum quality enhanced impacts graduate's employability. Moreover, the population was available and could give out their experiences just as the situation is.

Sample population and sampling technique.

The homogenous sampling technique was used to obtain a sample size of 203 graduates and 23 employers. We used this sampling technique because the target group has the same characteristics and it will enable a detailed investigation of the phenomenon. Instruments for data collection were questionnaires. We used questionnaires because a large-scale survey was needed to ensure that a wide range of people and experiences are included and that, results can be generalised to the whole population.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

The data was analysed using the cross-tabulation analysis through SPSS statistical tool.

Items	Statements		A	D	UN	Mean
01	Knowledge on curriculum development	fr.	72	106	48	194
		%	31.8	46.9	21.2	
02	Curriculum development membership	fr.	03	209	14	216.6
		%	1.3	92.4	6.1	
03	Positive impression on Yaoundé I's curriculum	fr.	12	168	46	195.3
		%	5.3	74.3	20.3	
04	Positive impression on BP computer offer	fr.	88	93	45	196
		%	38.9	41.1	19.9	
05	BP computer facilitates the teaching-learning process	fr.	71	46	109	153.3
		%	31.4	20.3	48.2	
06	Presence of additional skill-based programs in Yaoundé I	fr.	26	103	97	161.3
		%	11.5	45.5	42.9	
07	Current curriculum allows for internship	fr.	17	92	117	148
		%	5.5	40.7	51.7	
08	Employers present in curriculum development process	fr.	00	206	20	212.6
		%	00	91.1	8.8	
09	Current curriculum reflects the job market	fr.	08	91	127	141.3
		%	3.5	40.2	56.1	
10	Possession of basic text books by students	fr.	10	107	109	153.3
		%	4.4	47.3	48.2	
11	Teachers' role is necessary for learning	fr.	102	96	28	207.3
		%	45.1	42.4	12.3	
12	Textbooks' are necessary for learning	fr.	156	34	36	202
		%	69.0	15.0	15.9	
13	Curriculum quality assurance improves learning skills	fr.	209	05	12	379.6
		%	92.6	2.2	5.3	
14	Innovations on curriculum brings about employability	fr.	188	07	31	205.3
		%	83.1	3.0	13.7	
15	BP computer improves ICT skills and lead to employability	fr.	94	57	75	176
		%	41.5	25.2	33.1	
16	Absence of employers in curriculum development teams lead to job market imbalances	fr.	173	12	41	198.6
		%	76.5	5.3	18.1	

Correlations			Curriculum assurance	quality	Graduates' employability
Spearman's rho	Curriculum assurance	Correlation Coefficient	1,000		632
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.		,000
		N	226		226
	Graduates' employability (ability to pick or create a job)	Correlation Coefficient	632		1,000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	,000		.
		N	226		226

N/B: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

V. MAIN FINDINGS

The relationship between curriculum quality assurance and graduates' employability is significant as far as their ability to pick or create a job immediately after University in Cameroon is concern; implying that the P-value < 0.05 (P-value being the error margin). This affirms UNESCO (2018) declaration that curriculum has that potential to link academia and the labour market. This linkage agrees with Deikmann's Signalling Theory which Michael Spence applied on education as job market signalling model (JMSM). Therefore, curriculum QA is significant in graduate's employability.

According to our analysis, most employers do not know what a curriculum is and they are never invited during curriculum conception. This brings in fragmentation in the chain thus a possible mismatch. Meanwhile Marchado's (2008) accentuates that curriculum should be constructed locally and never carried over from another country. Also, ADA (2008) says a curriculum should reflect the attitudes and feelings of a society towards its own well-being and development. Thus, the above fragmentation hampers curriculum and graduate's employability immensely.

Analysis also shows that majority of employers and graduates are dissatisfied with the present curriculum because it does not give way for internship and it is void of skill-based courses. This shares Samfoga (2002) affirmation that most departments of the University of Yaoundé I is more theory oriented. Meanwhile Yorke(2006), defines employability is a set of achievements-skills, understanding and personal attribute. This shows that with the present theory based curriculum, graduates are bound to remain unemployed because they are inapt.

Moreover, many students agree that text books, teachers help immensely in the learning process. Others also acknowledge the recent BP computer offer as a great learning tool and has improved ICT skills learning skills among students. This upholds Schultz(1960), declaration that H.C consist the accumulation of all prior investment in education...These knowledge and skills are in great part the product of investment and combined with other human

investments to make a people productive in all dimensions. Tafah et al. (2012), concludes here that H.C measured by education and health impacts significantly and positively on economic growth. Therefore, the state's investment on PB computer will concomitantly improve skills and graduates that will improve graduate's employability.

Our analysis also holds that enhancing curriculum quality assurance and innovation impacts graduate's employability. It confirms UNESCO (2018, p.79), affirmation that IQA can have an academic, managerial, pedagogic or employment focus. Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2005) conclude that the dominant approach currently emphasise the quality of student learning and IQA would have a prime purpose of enriching the learning experience of students. Thus, improvement in graduate's employability.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the above findings, the following recommendations were made:

To the state.

- The socio political and economic circumstances of the country should be prioritized during curriculum planning. Economic operators should be involved in curriculum conception.
- Modify the present curriculum, involving specific fields and skills.

To the University

- Create partnership with structures (companies, enterprises) both national and international in order to enable students take internship regularly.
- Ensure all teachers draw syllables from the modified curriculum, institutes workshops
- Ensure quantity and quality program coverage, teacher's evaluation and promotion.
- Encourage specialization among teachers.
- Invite accreditation institution to rate your institution with global standard.

To students

- Invest in your education. Buy books and read them to improve your personal development and enlarge your horizon for soft skills envisage of job market.

VII. CONCLUSION

Higher education is indeed a fertile training ground that ensures graduate's employment in every society. However, it is not solely the H.E per say but its components such as curriculum and pedagogy are indispensable channels through which the desired knowledge in quantity and quality is impacted on the learners. Once the curriculum quality is ensured in an education system, its output or products become more effective and efficient at work, thus, higher employer's demand.

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