BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE GOWN AND THE TOWN IN NIGERIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract
The Gown refers to the world of learning or the Academia which is an institution that equips graduates for employment or self-reliance in the labour market. The Town on the other hand refers to the world of works or Industry where graduates are expected to secure employment to earn a living and monetary capacity to improve their standard of living. In the less developed countries, there seems to exist a gap between these two worlds which manifests in form of inability of graduates to be effectively and efficiently employed or to successfully establish their own businesses based on the skills acquired during their training in the world of learning. The Academia in the developing countries confronts an uphill task of sufficient and sustained investment required in the Academia that can bridge the gap between the Academia and the Industry. The study examined the mechanisms of bridging the gap, through the Academia multi-disciplinary approach to research and learning, and developing a vision framework and strategies that will attract the Industry. Also, relevant government agencies are to set up mechanisms to attract Academic research and development that will be relevant to the Industry. The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC) for example has collaborated with the Nigerian Academia in the field of Infrastructure, Research and Development (R&D), and Capacity Development as part of its Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR). The effective sequences of the Commission's CSR have greatly assisted in bridging the gap between the Academia and the Industry.

Keywords: Gown, Town, Bridge, Gap, Collaboration.

Introduction
Education is a dynamic instrument of change that prepares its recipients for the world of work. For this to be achieved, there must be provision of adequate educational resources coupled with competent teachers who will be able to impart the required skills in the graduates in order to become employable in the labour market. Relevant job-related knowledge and skills are more important than degrees as far as employers of labour are concerned. At present fresh graduates seeking employment suddenly realized that several years of learning at the university no

longer suffice to succeed in the world of work because employers demand for specific skills that will enhance their productivity. Universities worldwide turnout millions of graduates each year but only a few of them secure employment after graduation. According to the National Manpower Board (2004) less than 10% of graduate outturn secures employment in the formal sector of the economy either because of lack of vacancies or the mismatch that exists between the skills acquired in school and the requirement of the employers. Most of the new graduates either fail to secure any job which is known as unemployment or work only a few hours per day and received only peanuts which is underemployment. The realization of this mismatch caused dissatisfaction with their chosen field of study. The skills gap is evident and the perceptions gap between employers, educators and students is equally obvious .

The debate on who should bridge the skills gap between Academia and Industry is not new and is never-ending. All hands must be on deck including the educational institutions, parents, government and other stakeholders in finding solution to the Academia-Industry gap. It is time to give new actors a bigger role and embrace innovative models of learning that can impart in learners, the skills that are relevant today and will be in demand in the future (Omoniyi, 2011). There are 'Seven Survival Skills' such as critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration, agility and adaptability, initiative and entrepreneurship, communication, curiosity and analysis that are essential requirements for employment or self-reliance in any economy in the 21st century. The Seven Survival Skills are actually the much-needed fuel to kick-start economic development of any nation. The importance of skills acquisition for labour market demands prompted even non-profit organizations to organize programmes in countries across the Middle East and North Africa that are focused on workforce readiness, financial literacy and entrepreneurship so that students can be offered opportunities to work closely with the industry and also start their own businesses while learning soft-skills.

Unemployment in any country is a grave concern and can be attributed to multiple factors like slow economic growth, slow industrial growth, lack of investment opportunities, mismatch between the gown and the town etc. There is another important aspect which is often ignored. While the academia is complaining for slow job market, the industry is complaining about non availability of quality graduates. It is quite common to witness an individual doing excellent job in interviews but fails miserably in practical scenarios. At present, mere theoretical knowledge and business models no more enable graduates to stand out of the crowd in the labour market. Even graduates aiming towards entrepreneurship, normally settle for less creative ideas like franchising instead of opting for ideas that can address the gaps in the society. Asikadi (2003) posits that to bridge the academia-

industry gap, industry has tried to organize on the job trainings for graduates, however, it is not a permanent solution and it also affects industry's productivity negatively. While concern is severe on the existing gap between the gown and the town, it can be addressed with mutual co-operation of academia and industry through the revision and alignment of curriculum with industry requirements, industrial exposure, incubation centers, entrepreneurship and commercial viability and academic research.

According to Rohrbeck, and Arnold, (2006), the gap between the Academia and the Industry can be bridged by ascertaining the gaps in the curriculum to make it more practical. This can be achieved through involvement of industry specialists during curriculum development to make it more relevant to the need of the industry. This must be a continuous exercise for it to successfully accomplish its desired purpose. Students' internships should become mandatory for the graduates to have industry exposure while undergoing trainings in their respective programmes. Rohrbeck and Arnold further assert that the exposure can transform the internship, industrial attachment or student industrial work experience scheme. In the past such exercise was just for formality sake in the academia, the industries often refused impartation of relevant practical skills in the trainees. There is need to address the issue with more rigorous controls from academia towards monitoring interns as well as setting key objectives for industry to be delivered during internships. Such industrial experience should equally be extended to the lecturers and instructors in the academia for competence development.

Each university should have its own startup incubators, whereby students can be given opportunity to share and test ideas under the supervision of not only academia but also industry professional and should be provided with relevant resources including financial assistance. Science/Business Innovation Board (2012) asserts that technical knowledge should also be bridged with business knowledge as no technical project can be successful without a business case and no project can be successful without its technical aspect. Academia should devise courses in a way that this gap can be addressed. Business graduates should be able to understand technical aspects and vice versa. Technical, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Education (TVEE) will be most relevant for the achievement of such project.

Letherland, C. (2012) opines that more relevant academic research should focus on bridging the gap between knowledge producers and knowledge users. Academic researchers should come up with research papers that address core industry problems and should be more practical. Such research should focus on ensuring its practical worth. Both academia and industry have to work together to synergize

towards delivering quality graduates that can play effective role in economic development.

Relevant questions relating to bridging the gap between Academia and Industry include: What are the causes of the gap between the academia and the industry in Nigeria? What are the effects of the gap between the academia and the industry on the Nigerian economy? And how can the gap between the academia and the industry in Nigeria be bridged? The objective of the study also includes: investigating the causes of the gap between the academia and the industry in Nigeria, examining the effects of the gap between the academia and the industry on the Nigerian economy and proffering solutions to bridge the gap between the academia and the industry in Nigeria.

The Problem

Education as a dynamic instrument of change is expected to prepare its recipients for the world of work. For this to be achieved, graduates of such institutions must acquire relevant and appropriate skills that are required in the industry. Relevant job-related skills are more important than theoretical degrees as far as employers of labour are concerned. At present fresh graduates seeking employment suddenly realize that several years of learning at university no longer suffice to succeed in the world of work as employers demand specific skills that will enhance their productivity. How can graduates from the academia be readily employable in the industry? This study examines how the gap between the Gown and the Town can be bridged through collaboration among the academia, industry and other related agencies.

Research Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was used for this study with a focus on the research design, population of the study, sample and sampling techniques, research instruments and procedure for data collection. This design was adopted to report the prevailing state of the academia and the industry in selected tertiary education institutions and selected industries in South-West Nigeria. Academia-Industry Gap Questionnaire (AIGQ) was used for data collection from students and Heads of Department (HODs) in three Universities, three Polytechnics and three Colleges of Education while the resource managers of five of the six selected industries in Lagos and Ogun states were interviewed to elicit relevant information that can promote academia-industry collaboration for bridging the existing gap between them. The selection of the industries were based on National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) list of establishment in Lagos and Ogun states. Data collected on Nigerian Communication Commission was through secondary source. The institutions were stratified into federal, state and private ownership, while the stratified random

sampling technique was used to select the three Universities, three Polytechnics and three Colleges of Education. The sample was made up of ten percent (596) of the total population of 5,960 final year full time students in the selected institutions in order to maintain a non-biased sample. Secondary data were obtained from previous research publications, magazines, seminars, conferences and other relevant publications.

Data Analysis

The descriptive statistical tools such as the average and percentage were used to analyze the collected data qualitatively.

Scope of the Study

The scope of the study was delimited to the core sciences in the Universities, Technical, Vocational and Entrepreneurship Education in the Polytechnics and education courses in Colleges of Education. The sample was also limited to final year students in the respective institutions and disciplines.

The sampled institutions and students' population are shown in table I:

TABLE 1: Selected Institutions by Ownership, Location, Population and Sample

S/N	Institutions	Ownership	Location	Population	Sample
1	University of Lagos	Federal	Akoka-Lagos	750	75
2	University of Education	State	Ijagun,Ijebu Ode	690	69
3	Redeemers University	Private	Ede	640	64
4	Yaba College of Technology	Federal	Yaba, Lagos	810	81
5	Ibadan Polytechnic	State	Ibadan	660	66
6	Ife Polytechnic	Private	Ile Ife	520	52
7	College of Education (Technical)	Federal	Akoka, Lagos	700	70
8	College of Education	State	Ijanikin, Lagos	690	69
9	St. Augustine COE	Private	Akoka, Lagos	500	50
	TOTAL			5,960	596

Table II shows the list of industries Interviewed:

Table II: List of selected Industries interviewed by operations and location

S/N	INDUSTRIES	OPERATION	LOCATION
1	Fidson Healthcare PLC	Chemical	Lagos
2	De-United Foods Industry Ltd	Foods	Lagos
3	Yiscofem International Company	Chemical	Lagos
4	Golden Son Nig. Ltd	Manufacturing	Ijebu Ode, Ogun State
5	Black Camel Energy Ltd	Energy	Sagamu, Ogun State
6	Nigerian Communication Commission	Communication	Abuja

Interview questions administered to industries:

1. What is your perception on the relevance of skills acquired in higher education to industrial needs?
2. How will you score the students from higher education during their practical attachment?
3. To what extent do industries allow students on IT to use their equipment?
4. Are there adequate supervisions from school and industries during SIWES?
5. How will you score academia-industry collaborations in Nigeria?
6. What are the identified academia-industry gap in Nigeria? How can the identified academia-industry gap be addressed by the industries?
7. What are the challenges against the bridging the gap between academia and industry in Nigeria?
8. What are the merits of academia-industry collaborations in Nigeria? What are the specific contributions your industry has made to bridge the academia-industry gap?

Table III: Academia-Industry Gap Questionnaire:

ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD
Curriculum promotes skills acquisition				
Acquired skills aligns with industries' need				
Adequate educational facilities for appropriate skills acquisition				
Cordial relationship between staff and students				
Adequate practical experience in school				
Conducive environment for academic excellence				
Adequate practical skills acquisition during industrial training				
Adequate vacancies for student industrial work experience scheme				
Existence of obsolete equipment in school				
Availability of modern equipment in schools and industries				
Availability of financial motivation during SIWES				
Appropriate collaboration between academia and industry				
Adequate competent teachers for skills acquisition in school				
Existence of staff exchange between academia and industry				
Adequate duration for SIWES				
Adequate information on employment vacancies				
Adequate skills for self-reliance for graduates				
Adequate supervision of trainees during practical attachment				
Adequate motivation for higher degrees				
Other necessary additional information				

Findings of the Study

The findings of this study as shown in table IV are based on the responses of the students and the HODs of the selected institutions to the Academia-Industry Gap Questionnaire and the Human Resource Managers of the selected industries in Lagos and Ogun states to the interview conducted with them.

Table IV: Responses of Students and Head of Departments to the AIGQ

ITEMS	A	%	D	%
Curriculum promotes skills acquisition	320	54	276	46
Acquired skills aligns with industries' need	276	46	320	54
Adequate educational facilities for appropriate skills acquisition	250	42	346	58
Cordial relationship between staff and students	260	44	336	56
Adequate practical experience in school	235	39	361	61
Conducive environment for academic excellence	290	49	306	51
Adequate practical skills acquisition during industrial training	300	50	296	50
Adequate vacancies for student industrial work experience scheme	260	44	346	58
Existence of obsolete equipment in school	320	54	276	46
Availability of modern equipment in schools and industries	276	46	320	54
Availability of financial motivation during SIWES	235	39	361	61
Appropriate collaboration between academia and industry	290	49	306	51
Adequate competent teachers for skills acquisition in school	330	55	266	45
Existence of staff exchange between academia and industry	196	33	400	67
Adequate duration for SIWES	330	55	266	45
Adequate information on employment vacancies	276	46	320	54
Adequate skills for self-reliance for graduates	315	53	281	47
Adequate supervision of trainees during practical attachment	370	62	236	38
Adequate motivation for higher degrees	380	64	216	36
TOTAL	**290**	**48.7**	**306**	**51.3**

The response to the promotion of skills acquisition by the curriculum was above average with 54% positive response. However, their response to whether the acquired skills align with industries' need was below average, being 46%. The adequacy of facilities for skills acquisition was 42%. In the same vein, the cordial relationship between the teachers and the students was scored 44%, little wonder then why the adequacy of practical in the school was scored 39%. The conduciveness of the school environment had 49%, the vacancy for SIWES was as low as 44%.

While the existence of obsolete equipment was scored 54% by the respondents, availability of modern equipment in the industries was scored 46%. The financial motivation for student during SIWES was scored as low as 39%, while the level of collaboration between the academia and the industry was about average (49%). The competence of teacher was scored 55% but the staff exchange programme between academia and industry was very low (33%). The duration for SIWES was scored above average (55%).

Information on employment of graduates in the industries was scored 46%, while the skills acquisition for self-reliance was above average (53%). The trainees' supervision by the industry during practical attachment was above average (62%).There were divergent responses on the motivation for higher degree; while the University and College of Education have motivation for higher degrees, the polytechnics gets stock at Higher Diploma level except they go for bridge.

Responses to the interview questions administered to industries:

The industries' response to the acquired skills by the students were perceived to be less relevant to the needs of the industries. The score for the level of higher education students' skills during their practical attachment was less than maximum. As to the extent the industries aloe student on practical attachment depended on the competence of such trainees, while competent students were allowed to handle their equipment with staff supervision, there were cautions on the less competent ones to avoid industrial injury and damage of equipment.

The industries confirmed that the students were adequately supervised by the lecturers during the SIWES. As to how industries scores the academia-industry collaboration, they opined that a lot of efforts are still required to foster the required collaboration. However, the NCC has excelled in academia-industry collaboration. The identified academia-industry gap includes: inadequate, synergy, non-reasonable staff exchange, inadequate financial commitment, obsolete equipment, inadequate industry related academic research and lack of government's support. The industries also recommended better synergy to address the academia-industry gap.

Among the merits of academia-industry collaborations as perceived by the industries are: Provision of competent teachers and qualitative graduates from higher education, acquisition of adequate relevant skills for employment and self-reliance as well as the promotion of national and economic development in line with the corroboration by Ibidapo-Obe (2014) who averts that the profit driven industry should offer a natural route to maximize the use of innovative ideas of the academia via Transfer of Technology (ToT) and to also provide or augment the required investment support of the academia

Nigerian Communication Commission's Collaborations with Nigerian Academia

The Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) has collaborated with the Nigerian academia as part of their Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR) in many ways and consistent with the Nigerian Communications Act (NCA) 2003, in infrastructure, research and development and capacity development. Data sharing, e-learning platforms and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure to selected universities across the country. The NCC has sponsored Research & Development (R&D) projects in order to bridge the gap between the academia and the industry in terms of indigenous technological innovations. The commission has enhanced staff capacity of the academia in the areas of training and engagement. Presently, NCC is on course to finalize the involvement of twelve Nigerian university researchers from the six geo-political zones at the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) study groups at Geneva, Switzerland. The ITU study groups will further improve on the competence of the researchers especially in multi-disciplinary and propriety researches, as they connect with their global counterparts to provide intellectual support to the study group work.

Conclusions

Effective collaboration between the academia and industry would help mitigate the encumbrance of investment in the academia through improvising the needed sustainable resources, which will ease the academia reliance on government funding. As a matter of necessity, the academia should encourage multi-disciplinary researches and projects in order to attract proprietary research investors. Furthermore, there is the need for the academia to develop a cohesive vision framework and strategies that can address collaboration barriers, which in the long run will attract various industries. The NCC has collaborated with the Nigerian academia in the field of infrastructure, Research and Development (R&D), and capacity development as part of its Corporate Social Responsibilities (CSR). The effective sequences of NCC CSR are assisting in bridging the gap between the academia and industry. Relevant stakeholders should support the Nigerian academia by engaging them in collaboration, so as to foster economic growth and national development in Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. The academic curricula should be jointly reviewed with the industry to maintain synergy and alignment between the two.
2. Trainees in the academia including the lecturers and instructors should gain adequate exposure to industry practical experience to boost their competence.

3. There should be integration of technical vocational and entrepreneurship education into academic curricula for skills acquisition by graduates.
4. Academia should give priority to relevant academic research that is industry oriented to foster collaborations between them.
5. There should be synergy between academia and industry to bridge the gap between the two.

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