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## **ENHANCING GRADUATES' SELF-EMPLOYMENT THROUGH PRACTICAL DEPLOYMENT OF LANGUAGE SKILLS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*To promote self-employment among students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria, government introduced entrepreneurship programmes in which students are taught different vocational skills they could practice for self-reliance after graduation. It is a known fact that numerous individuals in the society are earning fat incomes from their ability to use a language skill for specific purposes. This paper aimed to put forward ways by which the practical deployment of the language skills taught in Nigerian tertiary institutions can enhance self-employment prospects of the graduates. Data for the study was obtained from a questionnaire titled, 'Graduate Employability Questionnaire' administered to two hundred (200) students of two polytechnics in Osun State, Nigeria. Only 151(75.5%) of these questionnaires were recovered. Findings of the study revealed that many Nigerian undergraduates were aware of the rising rate of graduate unemployment in the country. It was found out that many students of tertiary institutions had talents that could be developed through language skills. Students offering courses not related to language study were found to be active in different trades and vocations with their possession of the language skills. The paper recommends that tertiary institutions entrepreneurship units should mount special proficiency programmes on practical deployment of language skills for all students, irrespective of their courses of study. Also, students identified to have the ability to use the language skills for job creation should be encouraged with loans and grants-in-aid that relate to the vocations they can establish with the language skills. Language skills related trades and vocations can also be incorporated into schools entrepreneurship schemes.*

**Keywords: Self-Employment, Unemployment Rate, Language Skills, Entrepreneurship Trainin**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language use permeates every facet of human endeavours. So, language programmes are factored into the curriculums of undergraduates in Nigerian tertiary institutions. As part of General Studies requirements for the award of ND and HND in the polytechnics, 'Use of English', 'Communication in English', 'Literary Appreciation, and Oral Composition' are offered as compulsory electives. In the universities and Colleges of Education, there are courses such as 'General English' and 'Use of English' which all students are expected to offer and pass as part of their programmes. The main objective for this is to develop communicative competence of the students.

The National Board for Technical Education in its General Studies course specifications for ND and HND programmes states that the goal of GNS 111 "is to provide the student with the necessary language skills which will enable him to cope effectively with the challenges of his course, to use English Language effectively in the practice of his chosen profession as well as interact with others in the society" (NBTE, 1999). One of the sub topics listed to be taught under the topic 'Language' is to explain the four language skills namely listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. Olajide (2008) observes that 'Use of English' is designed primarily for students to acquire skills and display them, using the English language. He cites the instance of students developing skills "of advertising, singing, running commentaries, storytelling or even cracking jokes in English language." If English could be thus deployed for commercial purpose, then any language should be so useful as well.

Adebite (2012), discussing the basic skills of communication in Nigeria, submitted that the 'Use of English' is 'mounted in tertiary institutions in Nigeria in order to enhance the communicative competence of students to enable them to learn their courses well and also to perform well in academic and social situations.' This paper is of the opinion that acquiring good speaking and writing skills and displaying them in the indigenous languages as well may be of great benefit to the individual graduate that is well versed in them.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

### 2.1 Language and Its Benefits

Language is the only instrument that makes human societies to be better organised than that of the other animals because of its benefits and functions which cannot be over-emphasised or underestimated. According to Sarkar (2020), speech and a well-ordered language are characteristic of mankind and 'are the symbol and token of the boundary between man and a brute.' Language has been variously defined by different scholars and the aggregation of these submissions is that it is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols used for communication by human beings.

Languages across the globe perform similar functions which include self-expression, communication, interaction, entertainment, cultural transmission, persuasion and it is useful for commercial activities and education, among others. These functions are summarily described by Sarkar (ibid.) as communication, socialisation, imparting of information, 'cultural accumulation and historical transmission.' Language is also the most potent indicator of personality or marker of identification. In multilingual countries, the various languages in the country may be assigned different roles depending on the linguistic situation of the country as well as other peculiar circumstances or situations. For instance, in Nigeria, the English language as well as some indigenous languages is assigned different roles in the country. Where English is the nation's lingua franca as well as official language also used in the judiciary, mass

media and the education industry, some indigenous languages are given the task of being used as languages of educational delivery and commerce in the social milieu of their usage. Whether indigenous or non-indigenous, all languages are acquired or learned and used based on the same language skills acquired in a similar order across languages.

## **2.2 Language Skills**

Language skills are communication skills that help people to convey their ideas clearly and precisely. The four basic language skills in order of acquisition are Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Of these four, Speaking and Writing are classified as Productive (Active) Skills because while using them, a learner is active and produces sounds in speaking and symbols in writing (Husain, 2015). On the other hand, Reading and Listening skills are classified as Receptive Skills because a language user is generally passive and only receives information with them. This submission of Husain (2015) had earlier been expressed by Aydoğan and Akbarov (2014) as being related to each other by two parameters which are the mode of communication (whether oral or written) and the direction of communication (whether receiving or producing the message). Our emphasis in this paper is on the productive language skills which are speaking and writing skills. These skills are known to have provided jobs for people who do not have to wallow in abject poverty because of unemployment.

According to Birt (2020), writing can get people jobs as reporters, grant writers, columnists, communication officers, social media managers, communication specialists, advertising managers, copywriters, public relations manager, executive assistants, content marketers, proposal writers, content strategists, professors and directors of communication. On the other hand, speaking skill can get people employed as advertising sales representatives, announcers, coaches, customer service representatives, event planners, fitness instructors, teachers and human resource specialists. It is not all of these careers that are salaried jobs: some of them can be embarked upon for self-employment.

Writing on jobs they described as entertainment and stage-oriented occupations, Makinde and Alao (1987) identified dramatic arts, commercial art, fashion design, music, photography and modelling as some of such occupations that do not require extensive academic preparation to qualify for entry. Looking at these professions, one can see that the language skills (especially speaking and writing skills) are necessary for people to be accomplished in some of them, especially dramatic arts and music. From this, we can see that speaking skill is one of the skills that are much relevant in the entertainment industry.

Apart from the specific goal of developing people's communicative competence in the English language through the teaching of 'Use of English' and communication-related courses in Nigerian tertiary institutions, acquisition of the language skills is similar in all languages. Therefore, our presentation is not restricted to or particular about English: it as well covers indigenous languages whose knowledge may enhance graduate employability in different socio-cultural environments in Nigeria.

## **2.3 Unemployment**

Simply put, unemployment is a state of absence of employment, job or work for willing individuals. It 'refers to a state in which an individual actively seeks employment but is unsuccessful' ('The Economic Times' of 02 October, 2022). Identified types of unemployment include frictional unemployment, cyclical unemployment, structural unemployment and institutional unemployment. All of these forms of unemployment constitute serious economic problems because they lead to poverty and decrease in enthusiasm to get more education. In

fact, unemployment leads to exploitation and lesser wages. Sasu (2022a) is of the opinion that the unemployment rate in Nigeria is 12%, according to the International Labour Organization (ILO)'s methodology while it is 33.3% according to the Nigerian methodology. Writing on Nigeria quarterly unemployment rate, Sasu (2022b) submits that in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2020, unemployment rate reached 33.28% and it grew between 2015 and 2020, using the Nigerian methodology. However, the ILO definition of unemployment captures people between 15 and 64 who are actively seeking employment but cannot find any. In Nigeria, the unemployed include those who did not work at all or who worked for less than 20 hours a week.

**Figure 1: Quarterly Unemployment Rate in Nigeria from 2017 to 2021**



**Source: National Bureau of Statistics, Nigeria**

The above figure shows a consistent quarterly rise in unemployment in Nigeria from January 2017 to the last quarter of 2018, excluding the period between January 2019 and January 2020 and last quarter of 2020 before capturing that of January 2021.

### 3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

To stem the rise in youth unemployment in the country and to promote prospects of self-employment among graduates of tertiary institutions, many entrepreneurship programmes are being embarked upon by governments in the tertiary institutions where students are taught different vocational skills they can practise after graduation. However, not much thought is being given to the teaching of language skills which can equally be utilised for generation of self-employment by the students. This study was conducted to suggest ways by which the practical deployment of the neglected language skills can enhance graduate students' self-employment.

### 4. OBJECTIVES

The study has the following specific objectives.

- i. To confirm students' awareness of rising graduate unemployment in the country.
- ii. To determine the extent of the level of students' awareness of employments that can be generated through language skills
- iii. To find out if the current crop of students are ready to make money through the practical deployment of language skills.
- iv. To investigate ways by which practical language skills can be taught in the tertiary institutions

## 5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study was guided by the following research questions.

- i. Are students of tertiary institutions aware of the rising graduate unemployment in the country?
- ii. To what extent are students aware of the self-employments that can be generated through language skills?
- iii. Do non-language graduates have interest to make money through the deployment of language skills?
- iv. In what ways can language skills be taught for self-employment in the institutions?

## 6. METHODOLOGY

Two hundred (200) questionnaires out of which 151 (75.5%) were recovered were distributed to students of two polytechnics in Osun State. The respondents, made up of 64 (42.4%) male and 87 (57.6%) female students were randomly selected from nine (9) departments where they ordinarily would have nothing to do with language courses except Use of English and Communication in English courses. Of these, there were 65 (43%) ND 2 students made up of 24 male and 41 female among the respondents. The remaining 86 (57%) students were HND 2 students made up of 40 male and 46 female. ND 2 and HND 2 students were chosen as subjects of the research because they were terminal classes whose students are closer to the subject-matter of the research which is employment/unemployment.

## 7. PRESENTATION OF DATA, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

**RQ 1: Are students of tertiary institutions aware of the rising graduate unemployment in the country?**

**Table 1: Distribution on Awareness of the Rising Level of Unemployment**

	Frequency	%
Yes	151	100
No	0	0
TOTAL	151	100

Source: Field Survey, 2022

All the 151 respondents (100%) claimed to be aware of rising graduate unemployment in the country. So, it can be safely concluded that unemployment is not a strange phenomenon to the students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

**RQ 2: To what extent are students aware of the employments that can be generated through proficient acquisition of language skills?**

**Table 2: Distribution on the extent of the level of students' awareness of employments that can be generated through language skills**

TRADE/VOCATION	AWARENESS		AWARENESS %	
	YES	NO	YES	NO
Master of Ceremony/Programme Anchor	140	11	92.7	7.3
Poem Rendition at Public Events/Performances	151	0	100	0
Drama/ Acting/Skits Performance	151	0	100	0
Singing/ Musical Performance	151	0	100	0
Writing Novels/Short Stories	72	79	47.7	52.3
Home Lesson Teaching	151	151	100	0

**Source: Field Survey, 2022**

From Table 2, majority of the respondents claimed to be aware of employment opportunities that could be generated through the deployment of language skills. 151 (100%) was aware that language skills could generate jobs like poem rendition at social events and performances, drama, acting and skit performances, singing and musical performances and home lesson teaching. 140 (92.7%) of the respondents were aware that jobs could be generated from being Master of Ceremony/Programme Anchor while 11 (7.3%) claimed not to be aware of the possibility of making money as masters of ceremony or programme anchor. The percentages of those who claimed to be aware of the employments that language skills can offer are higher than those of who claimed not to be aware in all the vocations.

**RQ 3: Are non-language graduates interested to make money through the deployment of language skills?**

**Table 3: Distribution on Respondents' Courses of Study**

COURSE OF STUDY	SEX	
	MALE	FEMALE
Accountancy	10	12
Banking and Finance	02	03
Business Administration	10	16
Civil Engineering	04	05
Computer Science	10	14
Estate Management	15	15
Mechanical Engineering	04	04
Marketing	04	07
Science Laboratory Technology	05	11
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>87</b>

**Source: Field Survey, 2022**

Table 3 shows that a very high percentage of the students who are not studying English as a core course are willing and ready to learn vocational language skill if it will provide them sources of income after graduation. The table shows the number of interested students and their areas of interest.

#### **RQ 4: In what ways can language skills be taught for self-employment in the tertiary institutions?**

Students were requested to make free comments and proffer suggestions on how they thought the vocational language skills could be taught in the tertiary institutions. From their responses, the following suggestions were collated:

- Empowering the entrepreneurship units of various tertiary institutions to mount short term programmes that would involve deployment of the language skills;
- Organising talent hunt programmes to identify and promote talented students
- Provision of training facilities and skill trainers
- Provision of aides and grants to prospective users of language skills for employment generation by the school and government.

#### **8. CONCLUSION**

From the analysis of our findings, it is evident that Nigerian tertiary institutions students are aware of the unemployment situation of the country and the possibility of using their skills of language to make money through various presentations such as poetic/musical performances at ceremonies as musicians/singers, dramatists and skit makers, programme anchors and teachers.

#### **9. RECOMMENDATIONS**

This paper recommends that each tertiary institution's entrepreneurship division should mount special proficiency programmes on the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing for all students, irrespective of their areas of specialisations. This will make identification and encouragement of students with any of these skills easy. Also, students identified to have the ability to use the language skills for job creation should be encouraged with loans and grants-in-aid that relate to the areas where they can be useful. Language skills related vocations can also be incorporated into schools entrepreneurship outlines. Incorporating language skills related trades and vocations into their programmes will help in identifying those who are gifted and who can benefit from the vocations presented by these language skills.

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