

Acquisition of Employability Skills: A Desiderata to “Japa” Syndrome

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Introduction

The rate at which Nigerian youths are fleeing the country daily is distressing. Best brains are migrating daily leaving the country at the mercy of the few experts left behind. Besides, investors are gradually withdrawing their investments because nothing seems to be working out in the country any longer. This may be attributed to untoward hardship experienced daily as a result of political instability and bad governance which culminated into increase in poverty level, unemployment, underemployment, insecurity, high standard of living, hunger, moral decadence, just to mention but a few. Nigerian youths see running out of the country for their dear lives in search of a greener pasture as a last resort to the teeming problems which the government failed to address.

From time, people had been migrating from one place to another for specific purposes. Take for instance, migration from rural area to urban centres for education, commercial activities, social amenities and so on. But in the recent times, running out of the country has been the order of the day for Nigerian youths as reported by Ajanaku (2023) that in the last eight years, a combination of escalating economic hardships and socio-political uncertainties has set the country on the painful path of mass migration of its much-needed skilled manpower to foreign lands in what has become the ‘japa’ epidemic.

One of the major problems attributed to unemployment and underemployment is the issue of lack of employability skills on the part of the Nigerian youths. The issue of over dependence on certification and collared job has made millions of graduates turned out yearly from various institutions across the country unemployed/underemployed. The skills required by the industries in the world of work are not acquired by the graduates, some are half baked, hence the high rate of unemployment/underemployment daily. This lack of employability skills has made many of the Nigerian youths to emigrate in search of job elsewhere instead of establishing as an entrepreneur even if they could not get collared job. In this period of global unemployment, the importance of technology and vocational education and training (TVET) in reducing youth unemployment cannot be over emphasized. Employability skills are the information, experience, and resources that support and guide the understanding and practices of improving student and graduate employability. They are skills applied across a wide range of occupations including essential competencies or key skills, as well as a variety of additional cognitive, personal, and interpersonal skills that are relevant to employability (Uzoечи, 2016). Provided these employability skills are acquired by Nigerian youths, the issue of ‘japa’ might not suffice or be infinitesimally reduced.

Conceptual Clarifications

Employability skills are the abilities required for obtaining, maintaining, and succeeding in a job (Mangwaya, Ezron & Johnson, 2016). The authors explained that those skills are made up of a set of generic core/basic ‘hard’ talents, interpersonal/relationship ‘soft’ skills, and personal traits; employees with those abilities and attitudes, can get along with their co-workers, make key decisions, solve problems, get respect, and eventually become effective ambassadors for the company. Birgili (2015) opined that employability skills comprise core skills, key skills, essential skills, basic skills, and workplace skills. All these skills could be acquired through technology and vocational education and training (TVET).

TVET is a systemic process of acquiring and upgrading requisite

knowledge and skills needed for self-reliance. It is an education for those who need it, those who want it, and those who want to progress by it (Gonzovic & Okoye in Ogbuanya & Izuoba, 2015). Consequently, an individual is empowered to be self-reliant by acquiring those competencies and some psychomotor skills in TVET in an enabling environment. Hence, running away from the country does not suffice to such people.

A skill can be referred to as a talent or ability that comes from training or practice (Olupayimo & Edeh, 2022). Skills has been described by Ademiluyi & Olupayimo (2022) as expertness, aptitude and competences appropriate for a particular job. It has to do with expert knowledge/creative reasoning to a level of mastery. In the opinion of Mamman and Saba (2022), skill is an ability learned to act with determined results with good performance often within a given timeframe, energy, or both which generally requires certain environmental stimuli and situations to assess the level of proficiency demonstrated and used.

To Onyerinde and Falana (2016), skill is the ability to do something well, usually gained through training or experience that is needed. Skills refer to aptitudes and abilities appropriate for a specific job. Green (2015) also viewed skill as a personal quality with three key features viz: productive, expandable and social. In other words, a skillful person is someone who is very good at what he is doing.

Nakayama and Sutcliffe in Kehinde and Olatunde (2022) described skills as learned not innate, a goal directed and acquired when behaviour is highly integrated and well organized. The authors further classified skills as hard and soft skills. Hard skills are specific learned abilities acquired and enhanced through practice, repetition and education. Hard skills are teachable abilities or skill sets that are easy to quantify and are learned in the classroom, through books or other training materials, on the job, acquired through training programmes, apprenticeships, online classes, among others such as machine/equipment operation, computer programming, ICT skills, marketing and accounting skills, creative multimedia skills, system design and development, et cetera (Kagan & Kindness, 2021;

Doyle (2020b).

Soft skills on the other hand refers to behaviour and personality abilities or interpersonal skills such as creativity, communication, leadership, persuasion, collaboration emotional intelligence, teamwork, time management, motivation, problem solving and so on which enhances interaction among individuals (Kegan & Kindness, 2021). Digital skills are essential skills needed in these global age and as ascertained by UNESCO (2018) and Burton (2016), there is a growing number of jobs available for people with advanced digital skills. In essence, jobs are already awaiting people with such employability skills without leaving the country. It is worthy of note that these employability skills could be acquired through training in vocational and technical education.

Emigration is the movement of people from one country to another. It is the act of leaving a resident country or place of residence with the intent to settle elsewhere either temporarily or permanently. It is the relocation or process of people leaving one country to reside in another. Emigration is the act of leaving a resident country or place of residence with the intent to settle elsewhere. Conversely, immigration describes the movement of people into one country from another (Wikipedia, 2023).

People emigrate for many reasons, among which are search for greener pasture, security, employment, an improved/better living, etc. The situation of Nigeria has made a large percentage of the youth to desire to look elsewhere in search of better life, good health facilities, better education, and security to mention but a few which is difficult to come by in Nigeria of today.

Brain drain has been defined as the departure of educated or professional people from one country, economic sector, or field for another usually for better pay or living conditions (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2023). It is a term that indicates a substantial emigration or migration of individuals. A brain drain can result from turmoil within a nation, the existence of favorable professional opportunities in other countries, or a desire to seek a higher standard of living.

Brain drain refers to the movement of educated and skilled workers from nations with lower standards of living to those with

higher standards, since the supply of education and skills are often a labour intensive activity. Since education and skills are important investments in human capital, experts believe that those who have the necessary education or skills are more likely to relocate to industrialised nations, which provide a better return on their invested human capital. This is why John-Igbiele, Fowosere and Iyobhebhe (2023) lamented that Nigeria is currently sinking deep into a brain drain, and it is putting a lot of workloads on the workers left or yet to japa.

As recounted by Ajanaku (2023), in the last eight years, a combination of escalating economic hardships and socio-political uncertainties has set the country on the painful path of mass migration of its much-needed skilled manpower to foreign lands in what has become the ‘Japa’ epidemic. This was as a result of Nigeria’s underperformance due to inability to handle present-day complexities of governance, a situation that breeds maladministration, massive unemployment, underemployment, escalating poverty, widespread social unrest, frustration, tension and insecurity. This was corroborated by the findings of the Nigeria Social Cohesion Survey that seven out of 10 Nigerians are willing to relocate to other countries as a result of the crippling poverty, insecurity, hyper-inflation and high youth unemployment rate estimated to be about 53.40 per cent (National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020).

Japa is a Yoruba word for running, fleeing, or escaping from danger. Liu (2023) described japa as a way of running for ones dear life which was inspired by the 2018 hit song with the eponymous title by the popular Nigerian artist, Naira Marley. According to him, japa is a metaphor for an escape from a life lived in Hobbesian state, which is nasty, brutish, and short. It has become part of the everyday vernacular of Nigerian youth since seizing the national imagination in 2020. He stressed further that japa has been typically used to describe the desperation of middle-class youth to leave the country.

Substantiating, Ogungbile (2023) explained that japa signifies moving on to better pastures, which is still perpetually running errands in the disgruntled minds of Nigerian youths. He stressed

further that the growing desire among citizens across various age brackets to leave Nigeria is also a trend in most African countries as majority of the youths tend to change their environment and to better their lots in life in academics, economic and all other areas.

Top of Form

The damage done to the education sector of the nation has made many youths to become education migrants. The incessant strike action embarked upon by workers before their requests could be acceded to by the government had been a serious cog in the wheel of education in Nigeria. Hence, youths who have the opportunity of admission abroad sees it as a means of recouping time stolen from their life or avoiding time being wasted in future as they would be able to complete their academic programme in record time when they are away from the country.

For the unemployed and underemployed youths, japa is seen as a remedy when they could no longer cope with the situation in the country. A means of searching for a better life somewhere else. This has become an epidemic in Nigeria as majority of the youths are no longer interested in living in a country where there seems to be no hope for the masses any longer. Hence, their reason for 'japaing'.

Factors Responsible for Japa

Many factors has been responsible for japa syndrome ranging from bad governance cum political instability, poor implementation of policies which affects education, health and other sectors, poverty, unemployment, underemployment, insecurity, high/low standard of living, weak economy, social distress, distorted academic calendar, lack of amenities, hunger to moral decadence.

Political instability/bad governance has been the major factor that is responsible for japa syndrome. Ajanaku (2023) stated that *Nigeria underperforms due mainly to inability to handle present-day complexities of governance, a situation that breeds maladministration, massive unemployment, escalating poverty and widespread social unrest/frustration. These cut across all sectors in Nigeria as evidenced*

in the view of John-Igbiele, Fowosere and Iyobhebhe (2023) that the health sector in Nigeria has been majorly impacted by globalisation and ease of international mobility, that is, the ‘Japa’ syndrome. In the last eight years, a combination of escalating economic hardships and socio-political uncertainties has set the country on the painful path of mass migration of its much-needed skilled manpower to foreign lands in what has become the Japa epidemic. Buttressing, the Chairman, Nigerians in Diaspora Commission (NIDCOM), Hon. Abike Dabiri-Erewa in Ajanaku (2023) said that insecurity and unemployment are factors responsible for the recent ‘japa’ syndrome”, stressing the need to make the country conducive for Nigerians. Those in governance these days seems not to have listening ears and concern for the masses hence, the need for people to find solutions to their problems themselves somewhere else.

Poor implementation of policies have negatively affected education system in Nigeria. Incessant strike action embarked upon by the workers (both teaching and nonteaching). For instance, students who supposed to spend four or five years on a programme could not graduate until after seven-eight years due to incessant strike actions. This made those students who can no longer cope with the situation of things in Nigeria, and have the opportunity to japa grab such opportunities since they are very sure of the time of completion of their programme abroad as soon as they resumed.

Unemployment and underemployment are two inseparable major reasons while youths are fleeing the country. Unemployed people are those who are yet to secure employment while the underemployed people are those working but earning less than what their certificate qualifies them for. There are graduates with first, second or third degrees working as a security officer, teachers in primary schools and other places earning less than the worth of their certificates for survival. These set of people look for greener pastures in foreign countries as employment migrants. This is reinforced by Uche, Obisi, Okundalaiye, Ukonu and Oyewo (2020) that for all workers, the quality of life at work is crucial.

Lack of good health care policy and services in Nigeria is also a major factor of the japa syndrome. A lot of people are dying daily as

a result of inadequate health care policies and facilities in the country, hence, the need for health migrants. Some japa abroad to secure employment as health workers for better pay while those who needs better treatment for one ailment or the other also migrates to where their lives can be rescued health wise, even the Nigerian leaders.

Insecurity is considered as another grave factor while people are fleeing from the country. Nigeria has been bedeviled with insecurity since 2015 which had claimed many peoples life. Any opportunity for those who could no longer cope with the situation or have the opportunity to japa quickly utilize such opportunities.

Skill acquisition according to Chudi-oji (2013), is a well-designed procedure of acquiring new ways and methods of carrying out specialized functions. As a result of what Nigeria is passing through in terms of unemployment and underemployment, the policy focus of government since the beginning of the fourth republic has been on how people, especially the youth, can acquire vocational trainings in order to engage them in gainful activities (Fatoki, 2019). However, this has not yielded the desired result may be because of the implementation problem or lackadaisical attitude of some youth to employable skill acquisition that will make them self-reliant rather than collar job seekers. Buttressing, Chukwurah and Atah (2017) stated that around 4.5 million young people join the labour market each year with no possibility of finding work to support their families due to lack of employability skills.

Employability skills are a set of accomplishments, skills, understandings, and personal characteristics that help university graduates to find work and succeed in their chosen fields from which they benefit themselves, the workforce, the community, and the economy (Gill, 2018). In addition to learning, many business programmes attempt to teach employability skills that will be helpful at all stages of employment in the business fields, in addition to the technical parts of business as any country that loses competitiveness in this globalized world due to a lack of employable skills risks having foreigners fill job openings intended for its citizens (Kehinde & Olatunde, 2022; Idaka & Uzoечи, 2016).

In agreement with thee above, Wibrow (2018), highlighted eight

employability skills as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organizing, self-management, learning and technology. Employability skills are a fundamental dimension of employability that encompasses all individual and context related factors that influence one’s future employment prospects. All these can be acquired through training in vocational and technical education and other disciplines.

The Writers’ Opinion/Solution to ‘Japa’ Syndrome

The crux of this paper is that opportunities abound to those that acquire employability skills to succeed even in Nigeria of today. There seems to be few competent skilled workers to fill the various vacancies where such skills are required as a result of the state of education in the country. This is corroborated by Uchendu (2015) that the products of tertiary education in the twenty-first century appear to be skill deficient, that is, they lack basic skills such as digital, leadership, tactical, teamwork, communication, social and problem-solving skill. As a result, these graduates lack the skills necessary to find work for themselves.

In addition, it has been well documented that Nigeria’s higher institutions lack the tools to give students the skills employers’ need and as a result the issue of youth unemployment appears to be shooting up the sky because most of the graduates lack “employability” skills that are often acquired from vocational schools (Okonjo-Iweala, 2013). This made Okoye (2014) to lament that many of the so-called “expatriate engineers, who are being paid huge sum of money in dollars to build the roads and bridges in Nigeria are graduates of technical and vocational colleges yet, most engineers and technologists of Nigerian institutions are labeled unemployable.

Instead for them to ‘japa’, the standard of education in Nigeria should be improved and youths be encouraged to ascertain competency in whatever skill acquired to enhance their employability in the country. Apart from the general education, all students should take acquisition of employability skills seriously by ensuring that they acquire at least a skill that can be useful for them during and

particularly after graduation. The Nigerian government should also formulate policies that will make the skills acquired by the youths sellable that is, compensate workers with high pay as applied abroad.

Majority of the Nigerian youths have dare desire for prosperity at all cost and this is evident in the growing rate of crime daily; this might be attributed to high cost and low standard of living in the country. The weak economy coupled with social distress, hunger and poverty with insecurity paved way for those who are desperate to japa at all cost since the situation in the country is no longer palatable and endurable to them. However, these writers opined that if the government of the day finds solution to the issues highlighted above and many others, people can desire to stay back in the country.

The post COVID-19 effect on the world had paved way for some youths to japa. All the sectors of the nation needs overhauling. Whatever is attracting the youths abroad should be incorporated into the system of Nigeria. Restructuring of the country and the institutions is required at this time to solve the problem of japa syndrome at hand. It is worthy of note that majority of the emigrants were only concerned about the positive aspect of their adventure not minding the other negative side of the journey.

Conclusion

Majority of the Nigerian youths have dare desire for prosperity at all cost and this is evident in the growing rate of crime daily; this might be attributed to high cost and low standard of living in the country. The weak economy coupled with social distress, hunger and poverty with insecurity paved way for those who are desperate to japa at all cost since the situation in the country is no longer palatable and endurable to them. However, these writers opined that if the government of the day finds solution to the issues highlighted above and many others, people can desire to stay back in the country.

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