

Guidance and Counsellors' Roles in Equipping Nigerian University Graduates for Employability and Competiveness in the Global Market

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Abstract

The study investigated guidance counsellors' roles in equipping Nigerian university graduates for employability and competitiveness in the global market. One research question and one hypothesis were formulated to guide the study. The study adopted a survey research design. The population of the study consisted of 45 guidance counsellors from four Nigerian universities. The instrument used for data collection was a 10-item questionnaire. The instrument was validated by three experts, one from the field of Measurement and Evaluation and two from Guidance and Counselling all from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Mean, standard deviation and t-test statistics were used for data analysis. The study revealed, among others, that the roles of guidance counsellors include helping in the development of knowledge economy through sensitizing university students on skill empowerment. The study recommended, among others, that Nigerian universities should introduce new programmes in the various universities to build up youths in their various capacity and aptitude in skills and entrepreneurship related courses so as to compete globally in the market economy.

Keywords: counsellors, graduates, employability, competitiveness, global, market

Introduction

The competitiveness in the global market enhances the strategies involved in the process and activity of trading goods and services across countries. Global market therefore, is the process of purchasing or selling products and services across nations. Global market needs expertise skills and knowledge in form of human capital for perfect competition. Human capital refers to the economic value of a worker's experience and skill (Kenton, 2022). Kenton (2022) further states that human capital includes communication skills, creativity, experience, problem-solving skills, mental health and personal resilience. However, all the aforementioned attributes are possessed by human being who needs development in form of improvement of performance capabilities and resources. These improvement and development are necessary for university graduates, for employability and competitiveness in the global market.

Employability is a set of achievements skills, understandings and personal attributes that makes graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations (Yorke, 2006). Employability is defined as the ability to find, keep and progress in graduate employability and this ability is determined by individual factors, environmental factors and labour market consideration (Belile, 2020). In the context of this study, employability is the expert skills and knowledge acquired for sustainability and competitiveness in the global market. It is inevitable to exude the basic skills, knowledge, attributes, abilities and potentials needed to compete in the global market. University students are expected to be proactive and to actively improve their knowledge and skills to meet the demand of the workplace in the changing context (Bridgstock, 2009). Aloysius et al. (2018) assert that the graduate employability capacities do not only promote their employability skills, but enable the industry to obtain and sustain a competitive advantage in the dynamic world of work. Thus, in the same light, Godfrey et al. (2021) conclude that education is associated with adequacy of skills for employment and also related to the duration which graduates take to get employment after graduation. Trans (2019) postulates that the dominant discourse of enhancing graduate employability in university system still focuses on skills agenda. Rehman and Mehmood (2014) state that graduates need not only the technical skills to perform specific tasks they also essentially need to have the employability skills set: aptitude, communication, attitude, problem-solving and teamwork. Graduates need to work on their personal attributes such as confidence, communication and social skills which will boost their competitiveness in the global market. Competitiveness creates innovation and upgradability.

In this study, competitiveness is the ability of a graduate to achieve sustained high rates of determination, resilience, growth and development in the global market. According to Pio (2021), approaches that could be deployed by graduates to improve their global competitiveness included using diverse means to enhance entrepreneurial behaviours and mindsets of the students and adopting extensive use of visuals, digital tools and multimedia to enhance their creativity. Jagannathan and Geronimo (2013) assert that competitiveness is fully associated with workforce skills, management of how skills are used, and government's ability to formulate and implement education, training, and skills-based policies. Nonetheless, a graduate cannot be employable without possessing competitive skills for sustenance and adaptability. Hence, university environment usually provides opportunities for equipping graduates for employability and competitiveness in the global market. Therefore, in developing graduate employability and competitiveness in the global market, guidance counsellors' roles and responsiveness may help in such achievement.

A counsellor is a person whose vocation inclines towards building the reputation, inspiration, aspiration, personality and skills of students through counselling (Chigbu et al., 2021). Chigbu et al. (2021) define counselling as the process of assisting, guiding and exploring a client in the right direction so as to overcome educational, vocational, personal-social and emotional problems in order to build up a promising future. Hence,

through ascertaining the roles of guidance counsellors, the future of graduates may be assured for employability and competitiveness in the global market.

Most often, the credibility of equipping university graduates bears a big question mark, graduates focus on theoretical aspect of their course with less recourse to practical aspect, and they pay less attention to the needed field of entrepreneurship and skill acquisition. Based on the above reasons, there is need to ascertain guidance counsellors' roles in equipping university graduates for employability and competitiveness in the global market.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to determine guidance counsellors' roles in equipping Nigerian university graduates for employability and competitiveness in the global market. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Ascertain the roles of guidance counsellors in equipping Nigerian university graduates for employability and competitiveness in the global market.

Research question

This research question was raised to guide the study:

1. What are the roles of university guidance counsellors in equipping Nigerian university graduates for employability and competitiveness in the global market?

Hypothesis

This null hypothesis was formulated and tested at .05 level of significance.

Ho1: There is no significant difference between the mean response scores of male and female university guidance counsellors on their roles in equipping university graduates for employability and competitiveness in the global market.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey design. This design, according to Blog (2000), uses survey to gather data about varying subjects. The population of the study was 45 guidance counsellors from four Nigerian universities including University of Nigeria, Nsukka; Enugu State University of Science and Technology; Bayero University, Kano; and Kano State University of Science and Technology, Wudil with 15, 10, 12 and 8 Guidance Counsellors respectively. The population is small and manageable, so no sampling was done.

The researchers developed a self-structured instrument called Guidance Counsellors' Roles for Employability and Competitiveness (GCR-EC) with four-point response format of Strongly Agree (SA)=4; Agree (A)=3; Disagree (D)=2; Strongly Disagree (SD)=1. The instrument has 10 items and was face validated by three experts, one from Measurement and Evaluation and two from Guidance and Counselling, all from the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. A similar population of 21 university guidance counsellors from Anambra State was used during the pilot study. The data

collected from the pilot study was analysed using the Cronbach Alpha reliability estimate and the reliability coefficient stood at 0.69. To collect data for the study, the researchers employed the assistance of two research assistants. 45 copies of GCR-EC were distributed to the respondents and all were collected duly filled.

Mean, standard deviation and grand mean were used to answer the research question while t-test statistics was used to test the research hypothesis at .05 level of significance. The decision rule for the interpretation of the respondents responses was that for any item whose mean score is equal to or greater than 2.50, it is regarded as agree, while any item whose mean score is less than 2.50 is regarded as disagree. For the research hypothesis, the decision rule was that if the calculated t-value is greater than the table t-value at a chosen confidence level of 0.05 and a degree of freedom ($n_1 - n_2 - 2$), the null hypothesis of no significant difference is rejected; on the other hand if the calculated t-value is less than the value of the t-critical from the table, then the null hypothesis is not rejected.

Presentation of results

The analyzed data were presented in tables 1 and 2 in accordance with the research question and hypothesis that guided the study.

Research question 1: What are the roles of university guidance counsellors in equipping university graduates for employability and competitiveness in the global market?

Table 1: Mean with standard deviation of roles of university guidance counsellors in equipping university graduates for employability and competitiveness in the global market

S/N	Counsellors' roles in equipping University graduates for employability and competitiveness in the global market.	SA	A	D	SD	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1.	To assist in training and education of potential employers.	17	23	3	2	3.15	0.89	Agree
2.	To build the capacity of creativity and develop innovative ideas.	15	19	5	6	2.95	1.06	Agree
3.	Preparing students for lifelong career success through teaching them interpersonal and professional skills they need to succeed in the occupation.	14	21	5	5	2.65	0.90	Agree
4.	To assist in the coordination and promotion of academics, curriculum in view of current economic trend.	15	20	5	5	3.20	1.00	Agree
5.	To enhance the transfer of knowledge in the labour market, learning should be practical-based not theoretical.	14	21	6	4	3.10	1.09	Agree

6.	To advice students on the need to upgrade themselves in respect of specialization in Information Technology	6	31	4	5	3.15	0.87	Agree
7.	To advise them on the need to acquire field related certifications very early.	15	18	10	02	2.80	1.02	Agree
8.	To pay for students acquisition of skills, education and training.	05	02	30	08	2.08	1.08	Disagree
9.	To provide students with information about various available educational and career opportunities in the society.	10	25	5	5	2.90	1.00	Agree
10.	Encouraging the development of knowledge economy through sensitizing students on skill empowerment.	12	23	6	4	3.16	1.09	Agree
						2.91	1.00	Agree
Grand Mean								

Data presented in table 1 reveals that the respondents agreed with 9 of the items out of the 10 identified roles of university guidance counsellor in equipping university graduates for employability and competitiveness in the global market. The items they agreed with are 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10 with mean scores of 3.15, 2.95, 2.65, 3.20, 3.10, 3.15, 2.80, 2.90 and 3.16 respectively. They however disagreed with item 8 as their recorded mean scores is 2.08. The values of their standard deviation ranged from 0.89 to 1.09, which indicated that the respondents were not too far from the mean and from the opinion of one another in their responses. The respondents recorded a grand mean score of 2.91, which is above the 2.50 benchmark, indicating guidance counsellors roles in equipping university graduates for employability and competitiveness in the global market. The roles include the following: to build the capacity of creativity and develop innovative ideas, preparing students for lifelong career success through teaching them interpersonal and professional skills they need to succeed in the occupation, to assist in the coordination and promotion of academics, curriculum in view of current economic trend, to enhance the transfer of knowledge in the labour market, learning should be practically-based not theoretical, to advice students on the need to upgrade themselves in respect of specialization in Information Technology, to advise them on the need to acquire field-related certifications very early, to provide students with information about various available educational and career opportunities in the society and to encourage the development of knowledge economy through sensitizing students on skill empowerment.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the mean response scores of male and female university guidance counsellors on their roles in equipping university graduates for employability and competitiveness in the global market.

Table 2: t-test result of the mean rating of male and female university guidance counsellors on their roles in equipping university graduates for employability and competitiveness in the global market

Gender	N	\bar{x}	SD	df	t- Calculated	t- Critical	Decision
Female Counsellors	35	2.92	1.00	45	0.93	± 1.96	Not Significant
Male Counsellors	10	2.90	0.98				

The t-test analysis in table 2 indicates that the calculated t-value is 0.93, while the critical t-value is 1.96 at .05 level of significance. This implies that the calculated t-value is less than the critical t-value. Thus, there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male university guidance counsellors and female university guidance counsellors on their roles in equipping university graduates for employability and competitiveness in the global market.

Discussion of the findings

The findings in table 1 revealed that university guidance counsellors' roles in equipping university graduates for employability and competitiveness in the global market are preparing students for lifelong career success through teaching them interpersonal and professional skills they need to succeed in their occupation, to assist in training and education of potential employers and encouraging the development of knowledge economy through sensitizing students on skill empowerment. This is in agreement with Bridgstock (2009) who identified that university graduates should be proactive and actively improve their knowledge and skills to meet the demands of the workplace in the changing context. Trans (2019) concludes that universities should draw the student's awareness to the outside societal and labour market conditions and find ways to enhance not only the knowledge and skills but also societal networking and understanding. Through these means, they will be able to stand out in the crowd and develop their identity in a way to persuade employers that they are worth to be selected.

Conclusion

The study was made to ascertain university guidance counsellors' roles in equipping university graduates for employability and competitiveness in the global market. To this extent, it was identified that university guidance counsellors have tremendous roles to play towards equipping university graduates for employability and competitiveness in the global market through coordination, promotion of academic activities, renew curriculum activities, equipping students with knowledge and skills with practical orientation. In conclusion, therefore, for guidance counsellors to vigorously pursue and fulfill their roles, the government needs to put certain measures in place to ensure effective sensitization of counselling roles for employability and competitiveness in the global market.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers recommend that:

1. Government should promote the functionality and services of professional university guidance counsellors through proper sensitization and update of the necessary skills, techniques and programmes.
2. Nigerian universities should introduce new programmes in various universities to build up youths in their various capacity and aptitude in skills and entrepreneurship related courses.

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