GRADUATE TURNOUT AND GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT IN NIGERIA

AKINYEMI SAMUEL (PhD)
akinyemisam2006@yahoo.com

OFEM, IGOT BASSEY (PhD)
Igotofem@yahoo.com

and

IKUENOMORE SAMUEL (M.ED)

**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT
LAGOS STATE UNIVERSITY, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT

The issue of graduate unemployment in Nigeria has become a national concern as the unemployed youths tend to be more anxious, depressed and unhappy with their attendant sleeplessness than those with jobs. This situation has not only posed a great challenge to the economy but also retarded the economic growth of the country. The graduate unemployment in Nigeria is attributable to the fact that employees' education and skills acquired are inadequate to meet the demands of modern day jobs. This issue has become a phenomenal topic of discourse across professional gatherings in media and commentary reviews, employer surveys, national economic debates, social networks and employee forums. This study, however, analyzed the extent of the mismatch between graduate turnout vis-a-vis their skills and graduate employment in Nigeria. The study found that graduate turnout outpaced the graduate employment rate over the years in Nigeria. The total graduate unemployment rate increased from 25.6 percent in the year 2003 to 40.3 percent as at March, 2009. The increase in the graduate unemployment rate was largely attributed to the mismatch between graduate employee skills and those skills required for performance in the modern workplace. The study also found that inadequate technical knowledge, deficient English proficiency and lack of critical thinking on the part of graduate employees coupled with high technological drive of most organizations in response to tougher competition in the competitive markets are the factors responsible for graduate unemployment in Nigeria. The study therefore recommended that the issue of mismatch between graduate turnout vis a vis their skills and graduate employment should be seriously addressed by taking a three-dimensional approach that involves the tertiary institutions, the government, and the labour market. The tertiary institutions in collaboration with the government and the labour market should plan their curriculum in such a way that employable skills that match up to the requirement of jobs in the present day workplace are inculcated into students while undergoing their courses of studies.

INTRODUCTION

The provision of education is a productive investment in human capital, which is a stock of skills and knowledge acquired through schooling. The greater the provision of schooling, the greater the stock of human capital in society, and consequently, the increases in national productivity and economic growth. Thus, investment in human capital is a function of the potency of the labour force to contribute meaningfully to the growth of Gross National Product, GNP (Samuel, 1990).

Given the contributions of education, especially at the tertiary level, to national development, countries, individuals, communities and corporations invest massively in education to uplift their educational attainment. In Africa, there has been continuous expansion in the budgets towards the education of its citizens. Alongside the government increased budget on education are the increases in enrolment rate and the number of tertiary institutions. In Nigeria, for example, there were 53 Universities, 54 Colleges of Education and 55 Polytechnics in 2003, but as at 2007, the numbers increased to 93 Universities, 56 Colleges of Education and 58 Polytechnics (international labour organization report on Nigerian education, 2009).

Sequel to the proliferation of tertiary institutions and the population growth in Nigeria, the total student enrolment increased in an unprecedented rate. Total university student enrolment increased from 606,104 in 2002/2003 academic year to 724,856 in the 2004/2005 academic year. Total student enrolment in the Colleges of Education increased from 197,041 in the 2002/2003 academic year to 351, 519 in the 2004/2005 academic year. The total student enrolment in the Polytechnics also escalated from 159,476 in the 2002/2003 academic year to 272,038 in the 2004/2005 academic year. In the same vein, total graduate turnout of these institutions correspondingly grew from 514,214 in the year 2003 to 619,097 in the year 2005 (extracted from the ILO report on Nigerian education, 2009).

Despite this upsurge number of tertiary institutions; enrolment rate; and increased graduate turnout, the issues of graduate unemployment and underemployment with their attendant consequences (such as increased crime rate, unfulfilled dreams, suicide, impaired financial position etc) are posing a great challenge to many developing countries of which Nigeria is one.

In Nigeria, national unemployment rate escalated from 11.9 percent in the year 2005 to 14.9 percent in 2008. As at 2009, the rate had increased to 19.7 percent (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). This situation is seen as a generalized waste of human resources.

The questions are: has there been enough demand for all these graduates by the labour market? Does this mean that the human resources development efforts of the government and individuals have been a waste since those trained cannot put their skills into productive use? How far has the Nigerian educational system been able to adequately prepare students for the world of work? Of what importance are skills acquired by graduates when they are not demanded in the labour market? These nagging questions are the focus of this study.

Hence, there was a need to carry out an intensive study to know the real situation concerning graduate unemployment as a serious national problem on one hard and on the other hand to know the skills demanded for by the employers of labour in Nigeria.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major aim of this study was to assess the mismatch between graduate turnout and graduate employment in Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

1. to assess the nexus between the skills acquired by graduates and the requirements of the labour market;
2. to determine the extent of the mismatch between graduate turnout and graduate employment in the Nigerian labour market;
3. to determine the extent of graduate unemployment in Nigeria; and
4. to make recommendations that will ensure a close link between our tertiary institutions and the world of work thereby reducing the unemployment rate among the graduates in the country.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In specific terms, this study was designed to address and find answers to the following research questions:

1. To what extent do the requirements of the labour market determine the skills acquired by graduates in Nigeria?
2. What is the extent of the mismatch between graduate turnout and graduate employment in the Nigerian labour market?
3. What is the extent of graduate unemployment in Nigeria?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Graduate Unemployment

The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) defines unemployment as the proportion of the labour force that is available for work but did not work for at least 39 hours in the week preceeding the survey period (Central Bank of Nigeria Annual Report, 2008). The CBN report went further to say that individuals who did not fall into either of these groups, such as retired people and discouraged workers, are not included in the calculation of the labour force. Abiodun (2010) regards unemployment as the proportion of the labour force, expressed in percentage, which is not employed at any given point in time. Graduate unemployment, therefore, refers to the unemployment among people who have graduated from tertiary institutions and who are qualified to work but do not work at any given point in time. In the Nigerian context, graduate unemployment refers to a situation where tertiary institution graduates, after finishing their National youth Service Corps (NYSC), and are willing and able to work but fail to secure jobs.

CONCEPTUAL NEXUS BETWEEN GRADUATES SKILL AND LABOUR MARKET REQUIREMENTS

A number of researchers such as Dabalen, Oni and Adekola (2000), David (2002); Akerele (2004), and National University Commission (2004), have revealed that apart from the qualifications that graduates possess, there are other attributes (non-academic skill requirements) which employers of labour emphasize. According to them, these attributes include analytical skills, good communication skills, good personal and social skills, technical and managerial skills among others. Boeteng and Ofori-Sarpong (2002), in relating these attributes to experience, stress that experience requirements are now stated in terms of competencies and skills rather than years. Employers of labour force are not only interested in those having higher education but also practical skills appropriate for job fulfillment (Abiodun, 2010).

It is quite unfortunate that responses of employers of labour on the competencies and performance of recent graduates reveal that these characteristics are lacking in the graduates which tertiary institutions are turning out into the labour market. Although, many employers reiterate that the graduates possess a broad and respectable understanding of the cognitive base in technical disciplines, but they express dismay in the preparation of graduates in those applied technical skills necessary for solving problems and enhancing business productivity.

Corroborating this fact, former President APJ Abdul Kalam emphasizes that only 25% of graduating students were employable while the remaining 75% were not because they lacked perquisite skills such as technical knowledge, English proficiency and critical thinking (the Guardian, August 31, 2010). This increasing trend in non-academic job requirements has posed a serious problem to the country and our tertiary education system. There is a growing incongruity between the world of knowledge and the world of work, hence a mismatch between employee skills and those required for performance in the modern work place.

CAUSES OF LOW QUALITY OF TERTIARY INSTITUTION GRADUATES

Dabalen, et al (2000), and Ogundowole (2002) have identified possible causes of low quality of graduates in the developing countries. According to them, one of these is decline in staff quantity which is reflected in the high rate of human capital flight. So many professionals and qualified lecturers have left Africa for developed world in search of jobs. Owen (Appleton and Teal, 1998) reporting the extent of the flight of the most educated Africans from the continent in 1993 said, in the UK, there were 134,500 Africans: 14,500 had first degrees and 4,600 had advanced degrees. Of all the ethnic minorities in the UK, Africans formed the largest percentage with recognized educational qualifications. Williams (Appleton and Teal, 1998) also corroborates this fact by pointing out that as at 1994, estimated 100,000 skilled Africans worked in Europe and North America. These skilled Africans were typically doctors, research scientists and university teachers.

Another factor responsible for low quality of tertiary institution output is a wide gap between student enrolment and the number of qualified instructors. Student enrolment in our tertiary institutions has outpaced the number of qualified instructors. Other causes are outdated curricula, shortages of learning resources, bad governance, deficient inputs, increasing class size and inadequate financing (Abiodun, 2010).

METHODS

POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The survey covered all the 36 states of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. All the Universities, Colleges of Education and Polytechnics (both public and private) as at 2007 were involved in the study.

The study also included all the registered employers of labour who belong to the organized public and private sectors in Nigeria. These consisted of those who were registered with the Manufacturers' Associations in Nigeria, the Nigeria Chambers of Commerce and Industry (NCCI) and government establishments.

SAMPLE

The study adopted purposive sampling technique to select the dominant sectors in the Nigerian economy. These sectors included both private and public labour organizations in the Federation: they are:

- Mining and Quarrying
- Manufacturing and Industries;
- Building and Construction;
- Hotels and Restaurants;
- Transport, Storage and Communication;
- Finance intermediation (insurance inclusive);
- Real Estate, Rending and Business activities;
- Public Administration, Defense and Community Social Services;
- Education; and
- Health and social work.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

The study utilized a checklist questionnaire titled Employers' Skill Requirement for Graduate Employment, and two sets of secondary data (archival data)

1.   The secondary data are:

       (a) Archival data 1

       These included number of universities, enrolment by course and yearly graduate turnover figures. These were collected from archives of National Universities

commission (NUC), Universities' record offices, International Labour Organization (ILO) in Nigeria.

(b) Archival Data 2

These included Nigeria labour force survey, rate of unemployment in Nigeria, and employment figures by sectors. These were collected from the archives of the National Bureau of Statistics in Nigeria, the National Institute for Social and Economic Research (NISER), Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), and International Labour Organization (ILO), Nigeria. Since the archival data are secondary data, they are considered valid and reliable.

2. The Checklist Questionnaire

The reliability coefficient of the checklist questionnaire for Employers' skill requirements for graduate employment, which was administered to 20 employers of labour across the private and public sectors in Nigeria, was 0.97 indicating the high reliability of the instrument.

STATISTICAL TECHNIQUE

The data collected were analyzed through the use of simple percentages, frequencies and charts.

RESULTS:

Research Question 1: **To what extent do the requirements of the labour market determine the skills acquired by graduates in Nigeria?**

Table 1: Checklist of the Skills Required by the Labour Market for Graduate Employment in Nigeria.

	Skills	Responses	Percentage response (%)
A	Verbal and written communication	20	100
B	Analytical and investigative abilities.	12	60
C.	Entrepreneurship and managerial skills.	16	80
D.	Teamwork	17	85
E.	Computer skill	18	90
F.	Time management	16	80
G.	Drive and flexibility	11	55

From the table 1, all the 20 employers sampled said verbal and written communication was an indispensable factor in the employment policy of graduates in their organizations. This represents 100% response in the table. Total number of 18 out of 20 employers attests that computer knowledge is also a basic requirement in the employment policy of their companies. This represents 90% of the total responses. While entrepreneurship and managerial skills, and time management attract 80% each of the total responses, team work attracts 85%, analytical and investigative abilities attract 60% while drive and flexibility have 55% in the table.

Figure 1: Skills Required for Graduate Employment in Nigeria
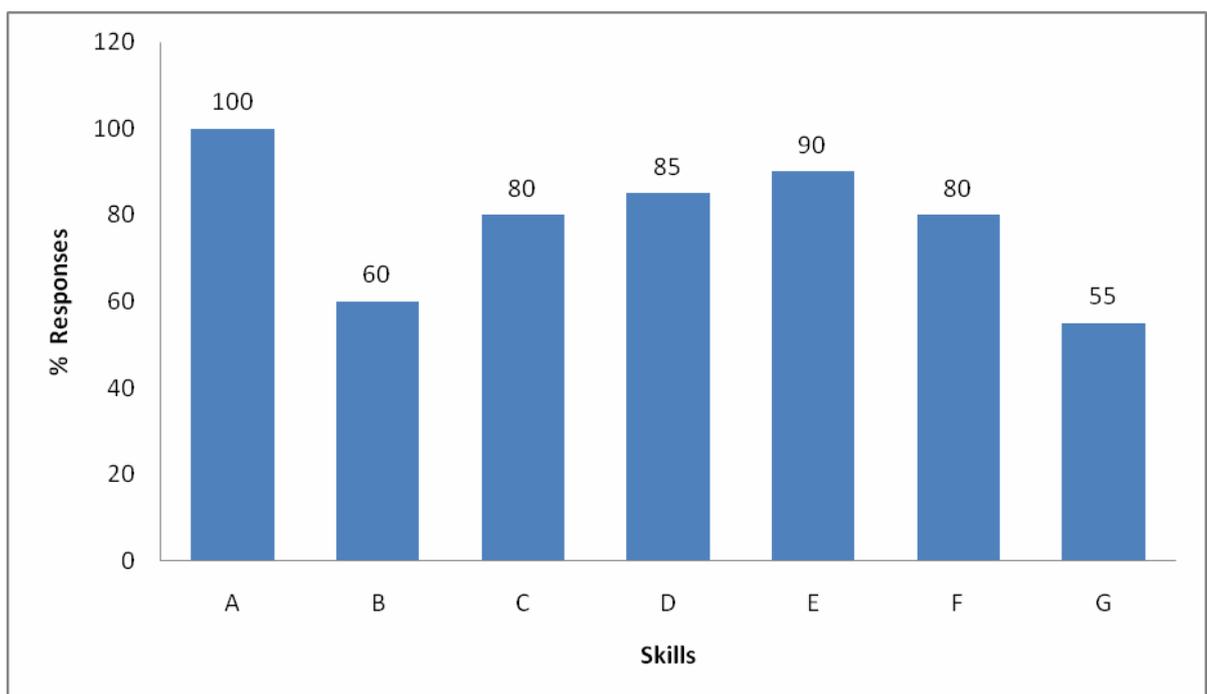
Research Question 2: **What is the extent of the mismatch between graduate turnout and graduate employment in the Nigerian labour market?**

Table 2: ***Extent of the Mismatch Between Graduate Turnout and Graduate Employment in Nigeria (2003 – 2007)***

Years	Graduate turnout	Registered graduate unemployed	Placement	Official Extent of mismatch	
	(A)	**(B)**	**(C)**	**Official difference (B) – (C)**	**%**
2003	514,214	2,541	657	1,884	74.1
2004	566,362	1,974	227	1,747	88.5
2005	591,097	4,329	939	3,390	78.3
2006	705,232	3063	758	2,305	75.3
2007	754,100	3768	340	3,428	91

Source:　National Bureau of Statistics/Federal Ministry of Employment, Labour and Productivity (2009)

The table 2 shows the extent of the mismatch between graduate turnout and graduate employment in Nigeria. Officially, the percentage extent of mismatch between the registered graduate unemployed and placement was 74.1% in the year 2003. It was 88.5% in 2004, 78.3% in 2005, 75.3% in 2006 and 91% in 2007.

Figure 2: Chart Showing Extent of the Mismatch Between Graduate Turnout And Graduate Employment in Nigeria (2003 – 2007)
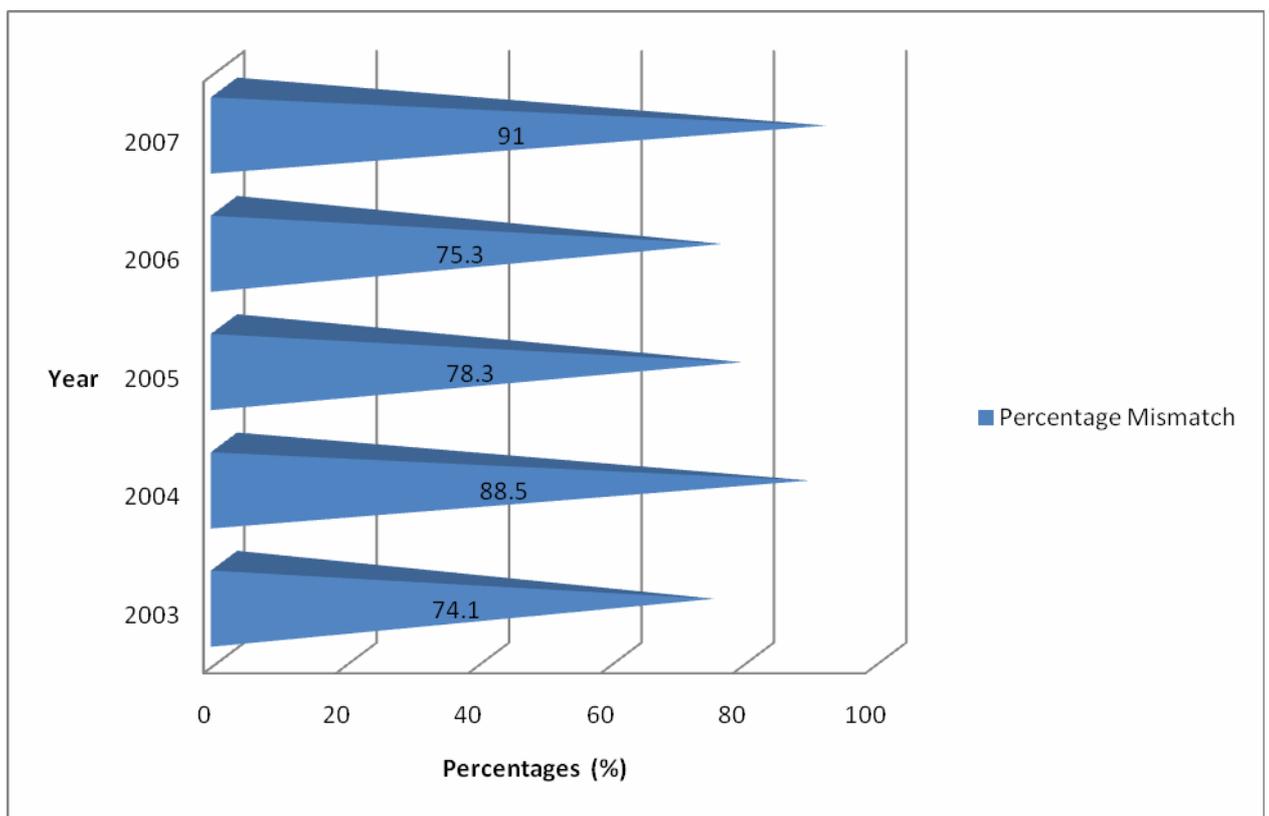
**Research Question 3:** **What is the extent of graduate unemployment in Nigeria?**

Table 3: Graduate Unemployment Rate in Nigeria (2003 – 2009)

| Years	Urban (%)	Rural (%)	Total %
2003	17.3	8.3	25.6
2004	25.2	12.8	38
2005	19.0	13.3	32.3
2006	18.8	13.4	32.2
2007	18.7	13.4	32.1
2008	15.8	21.7	37.5
2009	13.9	26.4	40.3

Source: Extracted from International Labour Organization Report (Nigeria), 2010.

From the table 3, graduate unemployment rate in Nigeria had risen to 40.3% in 2009.

Figure 4: Chart showing graduate unemployment rate in Nigeria (2003 – 2009)
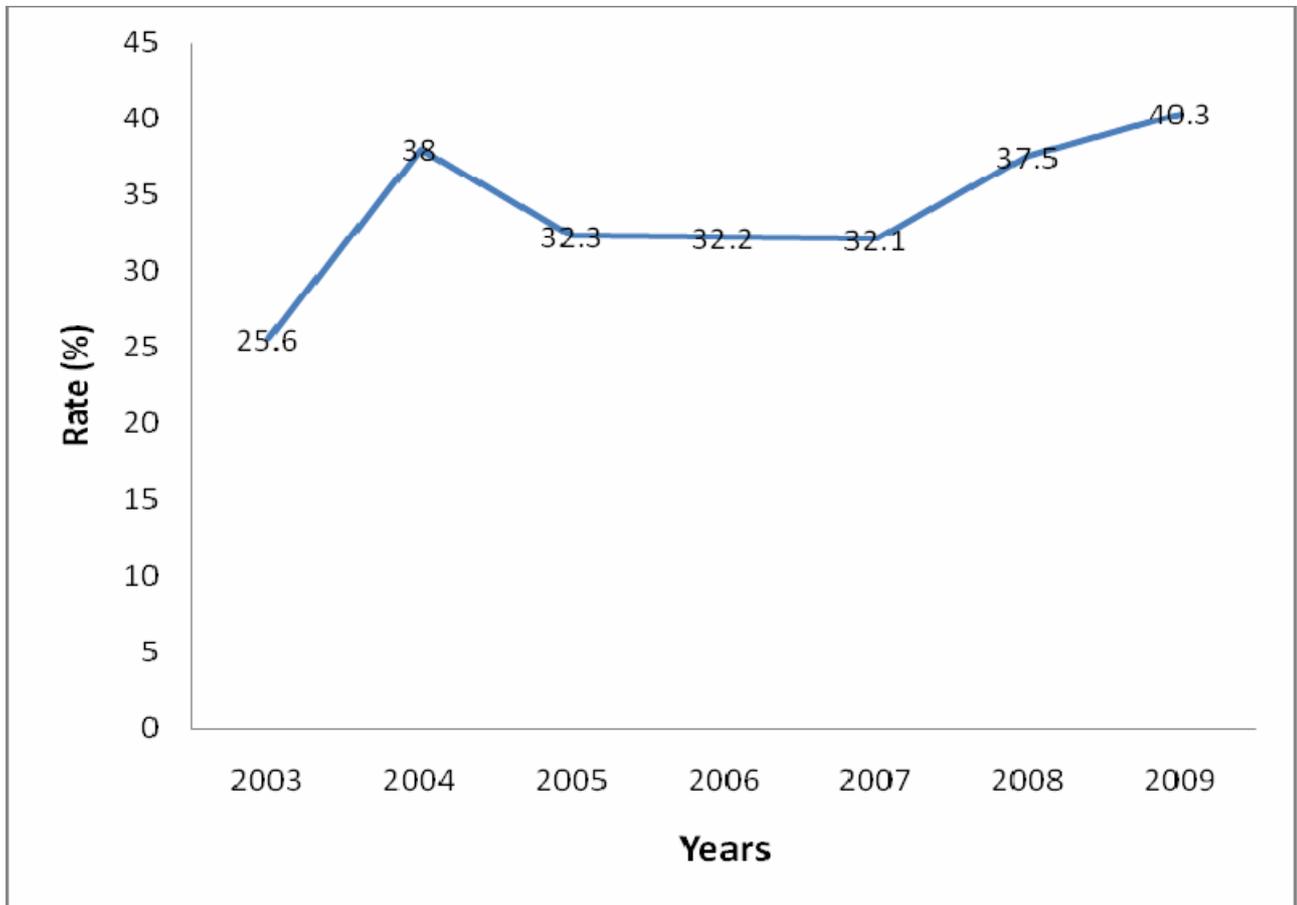
Figure 5: Chart Showing Graduate Unemployment in Urban and Rural Areas of Nigeria
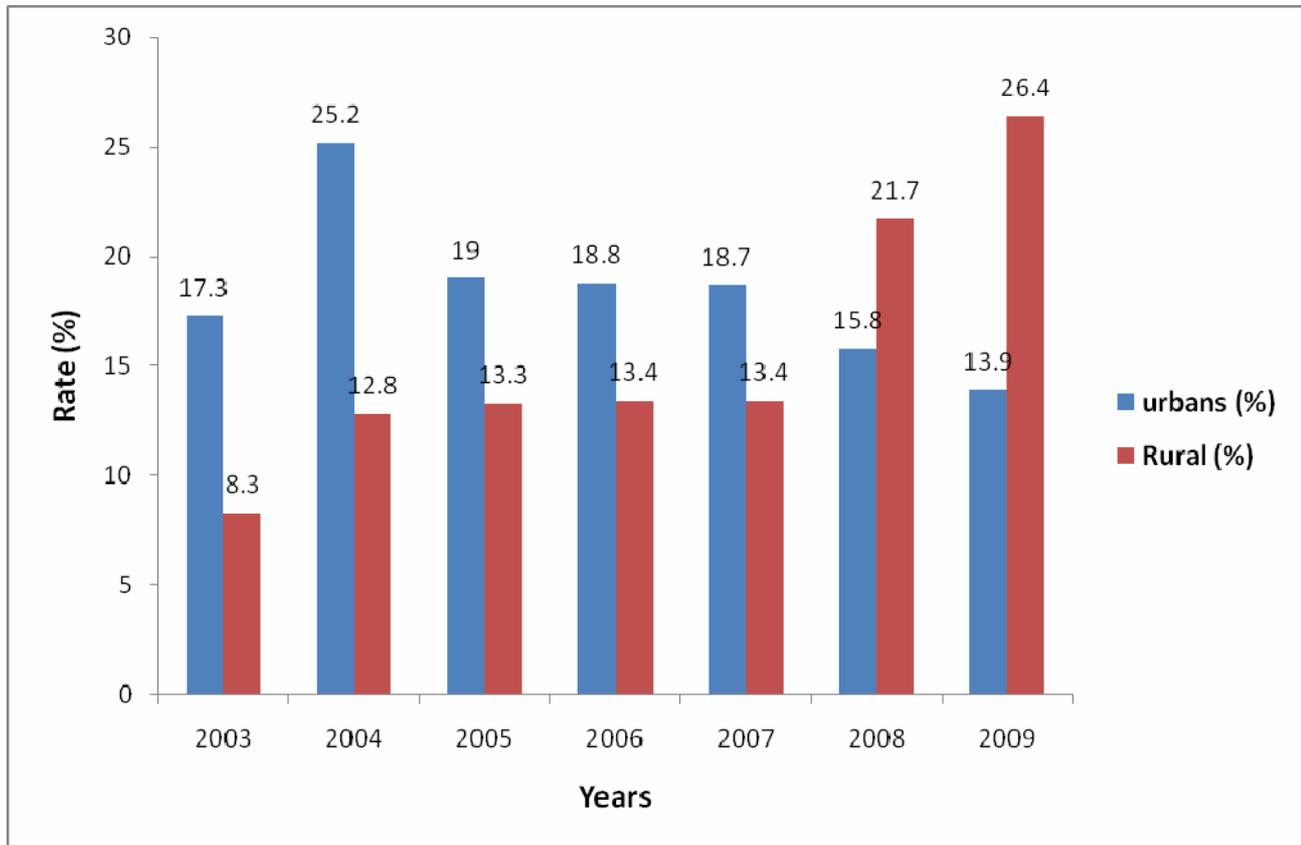
DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

This study reveals that Nigerian graduates do not possess employable skills to match-up to the requirement of jobs in the present day labour market.

It was clearly discovered in this study that apart from the qualifications that graduates possessed, there were other attributes which the employers emphasized as criteria for graduates' employability. These attributes include verbal and written communication, analytical and investigative abilities, entrepreneurship and managerial skills, team work, computer skills, time management, and drive and flexibility. This finding is in line with the findings of Dabalen, et al (2002); David (2002); Akerele (2004); National University Commission (2004); and Beeteng and Ofori-Sarpong (2002) that analytical skills, good communication skills, good personal and social skills, technical and managerial skills are, among others, the factors determining graduates being employed in the present modern workplace and not their qualifications. Corroborating this, former president APJ Abdul Kalam emphasized that only 25% of graduates

were employable while 75% were not because they lacked technical knowledge, English proficiency and critical thinking (The Guardian, August 31, 2010).

The study also found that graduate turnout outpaced the graduate employment over the years in Nigeria. Officially, the percentage of the extent of mismatch between the registered unemployed and placement between the year 2003 and 2007 ranges from 74% to 91%.

In the words of Bankole (2002), many subjects studied in the Nigerian universities are no longer marketable and this has posed a serious problem to the country (NISER). This has led so many unemployed graduates into crimes such as frauds, armed robbery and others.

It was also discovered in the study that the total graduate unemployment increased in an unprecedented manner in the years under study. By the year 2003, the total graduate unemployment rate was 25.6% but in the year 2009, it had risen to 40.3%. The World Bank (2009) report warned that unless constraints to growth were removed systematically in those industries that were particularly employment intensive and should stand a chance of being competitive globally, it was unlikely that these trends would be reversed, but further exacerbating tensions and youth unrest.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Tertiary institutions in collaboration with the governments and labour market should plan their curriculum in line with what is needed for graduate performance in the workplaces and national development. Literacy in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) should be an integral part of the educational process and should be integrated into the curriculum at all levels of studies in tertiary institutions. The objective should be to empower Nigerian graduates with the information technology skills needed for performance in both the workplace and private life.

2. Also, those courses that are not marketable in the present day labour market should be faced out in our tertiary institutions. Emphasis should be placed on marketable courses and this should be a function of national development expectation.

3. Verbal and written communication should be introduced as a course and be made compulsory for all programmes in our tertiary institutions. This should not be a criterion for employability in the Nigerian labour market only but should also extend to the world labour market. This will improve the communication skills of our graduates.

4.   Our tertiary institutions should be properly funded towards providing required facilities so that graduates would be sufficiently equipped with appropriate knowledge, skills and attitude for effective participation in a very competitive global society.

CONCLUSION

In the study, the mismatch between graduate turnout vis-à-vis graduate skills and graduate employment was investigated. The study found that Nigerian graduates did not possess employable skills that would make them marketable in the labour market and that graduate unemployment rate increased over the years. It was therefore recommended that tertiary institutions should, in collaboration with governments and labour market, plan their curriculum in such a way that necessary skills needed for job performance in the workplace would be inculcated into graduates.

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