INFLUENCE OF TERTIARY INSTITUTION ATTENDED AND ACADEMIC FACTORS ON GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY IN OGUN STATE CIVIL SERVICE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The widening disparity between the type of tertiary institution attended, academic-related factors, and graduate employability has raised concerns about the equal valuation and preparedness of graduates from universities, polytechnics, monotechnics, and colleges of education for civil service roles. This study investigated the influence of tertiary institution attended and academic factors on graduate employability within the Ogun State Civil Service. A descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted. The population comprised 424 directors across 86 Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs), from which a sample of 86 directors was purposively selected. Data were collected using three validated instruments tagged: Tertiary Institution Attended Questionnaire (TIAQ), Academic Factors Questionnaire (AFQ) and Graduate Employability Scale (GES) with reliability coefficients of .80, .77, and .84, respectively. Results indicated university graduates were predominantly employed ($X = 3.14$, SD = .877), all graduate categories were in high demand ($X = 2.56–3.65$; SD = .426–.837), class of degree influenced employability ($X = 2.73$, SD = .979), but only academic discipline had significant relative influence ($\beta = .361$, $t = 3.475$, $p < .05$). A joint significant effect was found ($F_{(3, 77)} = 6.655$; $p < .05$). The study concluded that enhancing curriculum relevance, fostering industry collaborations, and promoting equitable access to quality education are critical for improving graduate employability and it was recommended among others that curricular reforms and integration of professional certifications should be incorporated to enhance graduate readiness.

Keywords: Academic factors, civil service, curriculum relevance, graduate employability, labour market, tertiary institution.

Introduction

    Graduate employability has evolved significantly over the years, influenced by factors such as technological advancements, economic trends, and changes in educational

practices. Generally, there has been a growing emphasis on soft skills, adaptability, and practical experience alongside academic qualifications. Employers of graduates often perceive that graduates from Universities often perform better than those that graduated from Polytechnics, Colleges of Education or Monotechnics. This is due to the fact that graduates from Universities are believed to have been exposed to erudite scholars who have attained doctoral and professorial cadres (Adebayo, 2020; Oladele & Adeyanju, 2021). Graduates from some other tertiary institutions such as the Polytechnics, Colleges of Education or Monotechnics are perceived to be less considered for employment due to challenges such as insufficient educational infrastructure, curriculum mismatches, and limited access to practical training opportunities (Eze & Nnamani, 2022; Yusuf, 2021). However, initiatives by both governmental and private entities aimed at addressing these issues, including skills development programmes, internships, and support for entrepreneurship, have begun to yield positive outcomes (Okoye et al., 2020). Graduates who demonstrate not only academic prowess but also practical skills and entrepreneurial initiative are better positioned to navigate and succeed in Nigeria's evolving job market (Afolabi & Adedoyin, 2021).

Tertiary institutions in Ogun State offer a wide array of academic disciplines spanning the arts, sciences, engineering, social sciences, management, and humanities. Each academic discipline has been designed in such a way as to equip students with specialised knowledge, skills, and competencies that are relevant to specific sectors of the economy and workforce (Oyewole & Adebowale, 2019). The mismatch between educational qualifications and labour market demand, skills gaps, limited job opportunities, and competition for employment are among the key challenges confronting graduates (Adebowale & Oyewole, 2018). However, graduates from certain academic disciplines may possess advantages in securing employment within Ogun State Civil Service due to the alignment between their skills and the job requirements of government positions (Ibrahim, 2017).

Tertiary institutions that offer programmes tailored to the needs of the civil service, incorporating practical skills, industry-specific knowledge, and experiential learning opportunities, may produce graduates who are better prepared for employment in this sector (NUC, 2021). In addition to academic qualifications, the development of soft skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership is critical for graduates' employability in the Civil Service. Civil service roles in Nigeria often require effective interpersonal skills, adaptability, and the ability to work collaboratively in diverse teams. Tertiary institutions that prioritise the cultivation of these soft skills through co-curricular activities, internships, and project-based learning experiences can contribute to graduates' readiness for employment (Bakare, 2020). The acquisition of industry-relevant training, certifications, and professional qualifications can influence graduates' employability in the Ogun State Civil Service. Tertiary institutions that offer programmes accredited by professional bodies, provide opportunities for skills certification, or facilitate internships with government agencies may offer graduates a competitive edge in the job market (NUC, 2021).

Graduate employability refers to the capacity of a graduate to secure and maintain meaningful employment using the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired through

formal education. Knight and Yorke (2001) cited in Adeyanju and Olaniyi (2015) describe employability as a "synergic combination of personal qualities, skills of various kinds and subject understanding." They outline two conceptions of employability: the ability of graduates to perform 'graduate' jobs and the mere acquisition of any job. The former is linked to capability, while the latter suggests a broader, less specialised perspective. Graduate employability is shaped by societal, institutional, and personal factors (Olaniyi, 2018). Societal factors include labour market dynamics, policy terrain, and employer preferences. Institutional factors pertain to the prestige and location of the institution attended, while personal factors include socio-economic background, social capital, and academic discipline. The global labour market's demand for soft skills—such as communication, critical thinking, and teamwork—has further complicated the graduate employment landscape (Kautonen et al., 2020).

Tertiary institutions in Nigeria include universities, polytechnics, colleges of education, and monotechnics. These institutions vary in their orientations, curricula, and public perceptions. The choice of institution is perceived to significantly influence graduate employability. For instance, graduates from well-resourced universities are often seen as better prepared for professional challenges (Adeniji & Nkemdirim, 2021; Aremu & Oluwole, 2020). Universities in Nigeria typically focus on academic and research development, offering a wide range of programmes and opportunities for critical thinking and leadership (Clark & Evans, 2019). Polytechnics and monotechnics, on the other hand, emphasise vocational and technical education aimed at equipping students with hands-on skills (Taylor & Wilson, 2018). Colleges of education primarily train teachers and emphasise pedagogical and curriculum development skills (Smith & Johnson, 2020).

Academic factors such as discipline and class of degree are essential determinants of employability. The academic discipline a graduate specialises can influence their knowledge base and job market fit. Graduates from technical or professional disciplines such as engineering, law, or health sciences often find it easier to secure employment due to direct alignment with market demands (Tomlinson, 2017). Jackson and Bridgstock (2021) assert that work-integrated learning and internships aligned with specific academic disciplines can greatly enhance employability. Graduates with higher classifications (First Class, Second Class Upper) are often perceived as more capable and are more likely to be shortlisted for jobs (Cheng et al., 2022). Nevertheless, employers increasingly recognise that academic performance alone does not guarantee job readiness. A growing body of literature advocates for holistic evaluation methods that consider both academic achievements and transferable skills (Harvey et al., 2013; Yorke & Knight, 2006). Institutional curriculum alignment with industry demands is pivotal. Tertiary institutions that embed practical experience, internships, and professional certification programmes within their curricula have a competitive advantage in producing employable graduates (Kesler & Sulkowski, 2018). This alignment, however, remains inconsistent across institutions in Nigeria, including those in Ogun State (Fleisher & Jandhyala, 2019).

An understanding of the employability of graduates cannot also be divorced from the perceptions of the employers themselves. Their views regarding the relevance of academic training and the reputation of educational institutions significantly influence hiring decisions. Their perceptions offer vital insights into how educational and

institutional factors align or misalign with civil service needs. This makes them important respondents in research aimed at assessing graduate employability. This study is thus situated within the broader discourse of education-employment alignment, focusing on how both the tertiary institution attended and specific academic factors influence the employability of graduates employed in the Ogun State civil service.

This study is grounded in Human Capital Theory and Signaling Theory. Human Capital Theory, developed by Becker (1964), posits that investments in education increase an individual's productivity and economic value. It underlines the importance of skills acquisition and continuous learning for enhancing employability (Green et al., 2017). Signalling Theory, on the other hand, suggests that educational achievements serve as signals to employers about the quality of potential employees (Spence, 1973). The reputation of the tertiary institution attended and class of degree obtained act as such signals in labour markets like that of the Ogun State Civil Service.

Graduate employability in Nigeria has continued to rise, despite the increased number of graduates tertiary institutions produce annually. The situation poses a severe socio-economic threat, as the inability of graduates to secure gainful employment has far-reaching implications for individual livelihoods and national development. A crucial factor contributing to this challenge is the discrepancy between the graduates across various tertiary institutions and the expectations of the labour market. Additionally, there is a growing perception among employers that the academic training offered by many Nigerian universities, polytechnics, monotechnics and colleges of education does not adequately equip graduates with the practical and soft skills required in today's dynamic work environment. Despite various reforms and curriculum reviews, graduate employability remains a contested and unresolved issue, prompting the need for empirical investigations into the influence of tertiary institution attended and academic factors on graduate employability.

Purpose of the Study

This study investigated mainly the influence of tertiary institutions attended and academic factors on the employability of graduates in Ogun State Civil Service. Specifically, the study:

1. Examined the types of tertiary institutions attended by graduates employed in the Ogun State Civil Service.
2. Found out to what level are the graduates of science, education, humanities, law, management/social sciences, engineering, agriculture and health disciplines needed in Ogun State Civil Service.
3. Investigated the extent at which class of degree influence the chances of securing employment in the Ogun State civil service.
4. Examined the combined influence of institution attended and academic factors on graduate employability in Ogun State Civil Service.
5. Found the relative influence of institution attended and academic factors on graduate employability in Ogun State Civil Service.

Research Questions

1. What types of tertiary institutions were mostly attended by the graduates employed in Ogun State Civil Service?
2. To what extent are the graduates of science, education, humanities, law, management/social sciences, engineering, agriculture and health disciplines needed in Ogun State Civil Service
3. To what extent does the class of degree influence the chances of securing employment in the Ogun State civil service?

Hypotheses

$H0_1$: There is no significant combined influence of institution attended and academic factors on graduate employability in Ogun State Civil Service.

$H0_2$: There is no significant relative influence of institution attended and academic factors on graduate employability in Ogun State Civil Service.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research design of the survey type. The population comprised all 424 directors across the 86 Ministries, Departments, and Agencies (MDAs) in the Ogun State Civil Service. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 86 directors one from each MDA. The researchers ensured that only 86 directors in-charge of employment process were selected for the study across the Ministries, Departments, and Agencies, and that such directors possessed relevant experience and knowledge. Data were collected using three structured questionnaire tagged: Tertiary Institution Attended Questionnaire (TIAQ), Academic Factors Questionnaire (AFQ), and Graduate Employability Scale (GES) with a reliability coefficient of .80, .77, and .84 respectively, having used Cronbach's alpha to determine their internal consistence. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency distributions and percentages) for demographic data, while mean and standard deviation addressed research questions. Multiple regression analysis at the 0.05 significance level tested the hypotheses, with all analyses performed using SPSS version 25.

Results of Data Analysis

Research Question 1: What types of tertiary institutions were mostly attended by the graduates employed in Ogun State Civil Service?

Table 1
Types of Tertiary Institutions Attended by Graduates Employed in Ogun State Civil Service

Items	Response (%)						Rank
	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	S.D	
Graduates from universities are the most employed in our department.	40.7	37.0	17.3	4.9	3.14	.877	1st
There has been an increase in the employment of polytechnic graduates in recent years in Ogun State's civil service	17.3	38.3	39.5	4.9	2.68	.819	3rd
Colleges of education graduates are adequately represented in our workforce.	3.7	40.7	45.7	9.9	2.38	.717	5th
Monotechnic graduates are frequently hired for specialized positions.	1.2	45.7	45.7	7.4	2.41	.648	4th
The diversity of graduates from different institutions positively impacts our department's performance.	24.7	56.8	17.3	1.2	3.05	.687	2nd

Source: Researcher's field survey (2024)

Table 1 revealed that graduates mostly employed in Ogun State Civil Service are from universities, with highest mean value ($\bar{x}$) of 3.14 and standard deviation of 0.877 out of the other items that have mean values of 2.68 for polytechnic graduates (with S.D = .819), 2.38 for College of Education graduates (with S.D. = .717), and 2.41 for monotechnic graduates (with S.D. = .648). The table also showed that the products of universities, polytechnics, monotechnics, and colleges of education are ranked 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th respectively as they were employed in Ogun State Civil Service. This suggests a notable preference for university graduates over those from polytechnics, colleges of education, or monotechnics. The frequency distribution confirms that universities contribute the largest proportion of graduates to the state civil workforce. To probe further if the diversity of graduates from different institutions positively impacts departments' performance in the Civil Service, the mean value of 3.05 which is greater than the average mean value of 2.00 indicates that the diversity of graduates from different institutions also contributes positively to the general performance of the civil service.

Research Question 2: To what extent are the graduates of science, education, humanities, law, management/social sciences, engineering, agriculture, and health disciplines needed in Ogun State Civil Service?

Table 2
Mean Indicating the Extent at Which Graduates of Science, Education, Humanities, Law, Management/Social Sciences, Engineering, Agriculture and Health Disciplines are Needed in Ogun State Civil Service

Items	Response (%)						Remark
	HN	N	NN	HNN	$\overline{X}$	S.D	
Graduates from science discipline	72.8	23.5	3.7	0.0	3.65	.674	High extent
Graduates from Agricultural science	48.1	51.9	0.0	0.0	3.48	.503	High extent
Graduates from Engineering/Technology	23.5	76.5	0.0	0.0	3.23	.426	High extent
Graduates from Medical/Health Sciences	59.3	30.9	9.9	0.0	3.49	.673	High extent
Graduates from Arts/Humanities discipline	37.0	63.0	0.0	0.0	3.37	.486	High extent
Graduates from management/social science disciplines	54.3	45.7	0.0	0.0	3.54	.501	High extent
Graduates from Education and allied disciplines	30.9	69.1	0.0	0.0	3.31	.465	High extent

Source: Researcher's field survey (2024)

In Table 2, the mean values of 3.65 (S.D. = .674), 3.48 (S.D. = .503), 3.23 (S.D. = .426), 3.49 (S.D. = .673), 3.37 (S.D. = .486), 3.54 (S.D. = .501), and 3.31(S.D. = .465) showed that the graduates across science, agriculture, engineering/technology, medical/health science, management/social science, and education and allied disciplines are needed to a high extent respectively (since the mean values across all disciplines investigated are higher than 2.00 which is the bench mark). However, in relative term, science graduates are the most needed for employment ($\bar{x}$ = 3.65, S.D. = .674), and it is closely followed by management/social science graduates ($\bar{x}$ = 3.54, S.D. = .501), while the least needed graduates are from education and allied disciplines. Generally, the results imply that there is a high demand for diverse academic disciplines in the Ogun State Civil Service, indicating a multi-sectoral recruitment approach and the interdisciplinary needs of government operations.

Research Question 3: To what extent does the class of degree influence the chances of securing employment in the Ogun State Civil Service?

Table 3:

Mean Indicating the Extent at Which Class of Degree Influence Graduate Employability in Ogun State Civil Service

Items	Response (%)						Remark
	SA	A	D	SD	$\bar{X}$	S.D	
Graduates with upper class of degree have better chances of securing employment in our department	33.3	13.6	37.0	16.0	2.64	1.110	High extent
Our recruitment policy gives priority to graduates with higher class of degree	27.2	39.5	23.5	9.9	2.84	.942	High extent
The class of degree significantly influences the position or rank at which graduates are employed.	37.0	30.9	22.2	9.8	2.90	1.179	High extent
Graduates with a first-class degree have an advantage in career progression within the civil service.	9.9	48.1	27.2	14.8	2.53	.867	High extent
Recruitment committees in the civil service prefer candidates with higher classes of degree over candidates with relevant work experience.	11.1	40.7	33.3	14.8	2.48	.882	High Extent
The class of degree influences the kind of roles or responsibilities assigned to new employees in the civil service.	14.8	48.1	17.3	19.8	2.58	.973	High extent
Graduates with lower classes of degree compensate for their academic performance through other attributes such as skills or work experience during recruitment	37.0	48.1	4.9	9.9	3.12	.899	High extent
Weighted Mean					**2.73**	**.979**	**High extent**

Source: Researcher's field survey (2024)

Table 3 revealed that all items responded to by the respondents in this study recorded the mean values of 2.64 (S.D. = 1.110), 2.84 (S.D. = .942), 2.90 (S.D. = .1.179), 2.53 (S.D. = .867), 2.48 (S.D. = .882), 2.58 (S.D. = .973), and 3.12 (S.D. = .899) indicating high extent. Emphatically also, the weighted mean of 2.73 (with S.D. = .979) which indicates that class of degree to a high extent influence the chances of securing employment in the Ogun State Civil Service. The result implies that employers in the state civil service consider class of degree to a high extent, implying that academic performance remains a strong selection criterion.

Hypothesis One (H01): There is no significant combined influence of institution attended and academic factors on graduate employability in Ogun State Civil Service.

Table 4

Multiple Regression Model Summary Showing the Combined Influence of Institution Attended and Academic Factors on Graduate Employability in Ogun State Civil Service

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Regression	243.848	3	81.283	6.655	.000	Significant
Residual	940.473	77	12.214			
Total	1184.321	80				
R =	.454		Adj. R Square =		.175	
R Square =	.206		Std. Error of the Estimate =		3.49484	

Dependent Variable: Graduate employability
Predictors: (Constant), academic discipline, institution attended, class of degree.

The model summary of the multiple regression analysis, yielded an $F_{(3, 77)} = 6.655$; $p < .05$. This indicates a significant combined influence of institution attended and academic factors on graduate employability, hence H01 is rejected. The result reveals that institutional background and academic characteristics jointly predict the likelihood of employment within the state civil service.

Hypothesis Two (H02): There is no significant relative influence of institution attended and academic factors on graduate employability in Ogun State Civil Service.

Table 5

Standardized Multiple Regression Coefficients Indicating the Relative Influence of Institution Attended and Academic Factors (Institution Attended and Academic Discipline) on Graduate Employability in Ogun State Civil Service

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	B		
(Constant)	36.277	5.530		6.560	.000
Institution_attended	-.392	.213	-.189	-1.842	.069
Class_of_degree	-.073	.081	-.094	-.905	.369
Academic_discipline	.574	.165	.361	3.475	.001

Dependent Variable: Graduate employability

Table 5 revealed that academic discipline was the only predictor with a statistically significant beta coefficient ($\beta = 0.361$, $t = 3.475$, $p < 0.05$), indicating a significant relative influence. Meanwhile, tertiary institution attended and class of degree did not significantly predict graduate employability. Therefore, H02 is rejected for academic discipline but upheld for the other predictors.

Discussion

The results indicated a strong preference for university graduates in Ogun State Civil Service. This finding aligns with Adebayo (2020) and Oladele & Adeyanju (2021), who observed that university graduates are perceived to possess superior academic training and better exposure to intellectual resources. This perception could stem from the higher concentration of research-led curricula and qualified lecturers in Nigerian universities compared to other tertiary institutions (Onuoha et al., 2019). However, such preferences may unintentionally marginalise competent graduates from polytechnics, monotechnics, and colleges of education, potentially reinforcing systemic inequalities in graduate employment.

Furthermore, the significant need for graduates from diverse disciplines reflects the heterogeneous functional demands within the Ogun State Civil Service. The high demand for graduates in management, health, engineering, and education is consistent with findings from Ibrahim (2017), which showed that workforce diversification is crucial for the efficient delivery of public services. The implication is that academic discipline plays a pivotal role in employment decisions, confirming that skill-specific recruitment remains fundamental to civil service growth.

Concerning class of degree, the high mean score indicates that merit-based recruitment practices are in place, with preference for higher-class degree holders. This corroborates Dada (2018), who found that a candidate's academic class is often used as a proxy for diligence and competency. Nonetheless, an overreliance on this criterion may exclude individuals with practical experience and soft skills that may not be reflected in grade point averages, as noted by Oloruntegbe et al. (2020).

The multiple regression analysis reinforces the complexity of graduate employability. The significant combined effect of tertiary institution attended and academic factors suggests a systemic interplay between educational origin and academic merit. This supports the tenets of Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993), which posits that education enhances employability through skill accumulation. Similarly, Signaling Theory is affirmed in that employers interpret educational credentials as proxies for productivity potential (McGuinness & Bergin, 2017).

Notably, only academic discipline had a significant relative influence, highlighting its unique predictive strength. This finding supports Tomlinson (2017), who suggested that discipline-specific competencies are often aligned with job descriptions, thus influencing hiring decisions more than institution attended or degree classification. This underscores the evolving employer preference for specialised and practical knowledge over institutional prestige.

The limitation of this study lies in its reliance on a purposive sample of 86 directors within the Ogun State Civil Service, which, while targeted, may not comprehensively represent the broader perspectives of other relevant stakeholders such as junior personnel officers, recently recruited graduates, or private sector employers. Also, constraints of time and cost are identified as limitations for this study. The study was limited to Ogun State as a result of limited time and cost instead of reaching other states within the Southwest geopolitical region of Nigeria. If the study had covered the

entire southwest, it would have enabled the researchers come up with larger population which its result would have been sufficient enough to be generalised across Nigeria.

Conclusion

From findings, it is evident that tertiary institution attended, class of degree, and academic discipline in alignment with civil service needs are pivotal in shaping employability prospects. The results validate the application of Human Capital Theory, which postulates that education and skills acquisition enhance productivity and job market outcomes. Additionally, Signalling Theory is supported by the fact that employers appear to interpret the class of degree and institutional origin as proxies for ability and potential. Thus, tertiary education must not only equip students with certificates but also with demonstrable competencies, certifications, and practical experiences that align with public sector requirements.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following were recommended:
1. Tertiary institutions particularly polytechnics, monotechnics, and colleges of education should invest in enhancing their reputation and visibility within public sector by focusing on curriculum quality, research output, and industry-relevant partnerships.
2. Ogun State Civil Service Commission and relevant government agencies should continue to adopt inclusive recruitment practices that reflect the multifaceted needs of various departments by integrating graduates from diverse academic disciplines.
3. The Civil Service should review its recruitment process to recognise a broader range of qualifications beyond class of degree.
4. The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with tertiary institutions, should develop and implement curriculum reforms that emphasizes interdisciplinary learning, experiential training, and civil service internship schemes. This would facilitate a smoother transition from education to employment and ensure that graduates are job-ready upon completion of their studies.
5. Finally, educational policymakers and stakeholders should ensure academic disciplines receive strategic investment in terms of infrastructure, staffing, and innovation to produce graduates who meet the current and emerging needs of the Ogun State Civil Service.

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