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INTEGRATING SKILLS INTO HIGHER EDUCATION IN SUBSAHARAN AFRICAN: ISSUES, PROBLEMS & PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Higher education in recent years has become complicated, because of the COVID19 pandemic making content delivering complex, and skills acquisition a bit difficult to learners. into all programs and courses in Sub-Saharan universities to improve economic development and increase employability. Teaching in higher education is a complex passing of knowledge and skills to learners. Unfortunately, universities in Sub-Saharan Africa teach mainly theories. The expected outcomes of higher education, are supposed to produce learned and productive individuals with skills that can manipulate, alter or change environment technically into a much better environment, in every aspect. The method of the study is constructivism, interpretative paradigm and knowledge claims; X-rays some of the difficulties in including skills in higher education and also suggests ways

to map the higher education curriculum. Skills to be included range from Generic to Hard skills. With a methodology that employed critical analysis of research findings, conclusion is drawn that there is urgent need to include or integrate skills acquisition into all programs and courses in Sub-Saharan universities to improve economic development and increase employability.

Keywords: *skills, integrating skills, curriculum, higher education, employability, curriculum mapping*

Introduction

In developing countries, small and medium enterprises are the major source of income, and they play major role in national economies owing to innovations and economic growth (Aveni-agbaje &Osho 2015; Ochenda 2014; Mohammed & Eze 2012; Islam 2011, Surya et al. 2021). It is also worthy to note that small enterprises utilize many individuals with limited skills and few individuals with advanced or applied theory. Schumpeter's 1934 theory on innovation and economic development states that economies develop through innovation by entrepreneur (Jianhui et al., 2021; Sledzik,K.2013). This clearly shows that economic development and advancement are linked significantly to the level of skill acquisition and development of any nation. African continent is facing a big challenge as higher education is expanding in numbers and range of qualification (Nan Yeld,2008; Tristan McCowan, 2018). Sub-Saharan universities are facing enormous challenges in enhancing quality and relevance. In a survey conducted YouGov recently,52% of employers believed that no or few graduates were ready for workplace, 19% believed that all or most were ready for workplace, while 17% said none were ready or prepared for workplace. This report agrees with the findings of same study commissioned by the British Council on 'Universities Employability and Inclusive Development' recently concluded. Out of 38.1% estimated working poor in Sub-Saharan Africa, young people account for 23.5% (ILO Reports,2018). These data call for a rethink in the type of education provided by institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In her studies, Tevdovski (2015) on integrating soft skills in higher education mentioned that task-based and problem-solving activities provide students with appropriate skills and opportunities for life-based sustainability. In another study titled 'Skill Gap From Employers Evaluation' Mai (2018) recommended that soft skills can be included in undergraduate studies curricular as a compulsory content for all undergraduates.

"Integrating" as word is a verb formed for the noun "integration" which means, in this context

- To put together parts of or elements and combine them into a whole
- To co-ordinate or blend into a functioning or unified whole-Oxford dictionary
- Unified, combined leagued harmonized, include-Collins dictionary

Integrating skills, means there's disintegration and integration is needed to harmonize higher education and skills. The topic looks like **Eureka!!!,** we have found the key to solving the key issues in higher education in sub-Saharan Africa. This is just echoing the obvious fact; that our education in Sub-Saharan Africa countries lack skills and is not worthwhile in its functionality. The truth is that most ideas are only a combination of pre-existing ideas. Most times, all we need is to migrate an idea from one field to another. This migration is our main " stubborn issue of the matter" in sub-Saharan higher education. Since we are discussing **higher education**, we expect that we are talking of **higher skills** too. Employability is defined as the possession of relevant knowledge, skills and other attributes for gaining and maintaining worthwhile employment (British Council, Going Global Report, 2014; FEHINTOLA, Joseph 2017). In 2014,Nigeria's unemployment rate for undergraduates was 23.1%,Ghana 41.6%,Kenya 15.7%,in South Africa 5.9%(British Council 2014); meaning unemployment is significantly linked to population growth and Nigeria has the highest rate, with no corresponding growth in innovations and technology.

The most recent report is here as reported,ILO (2020);

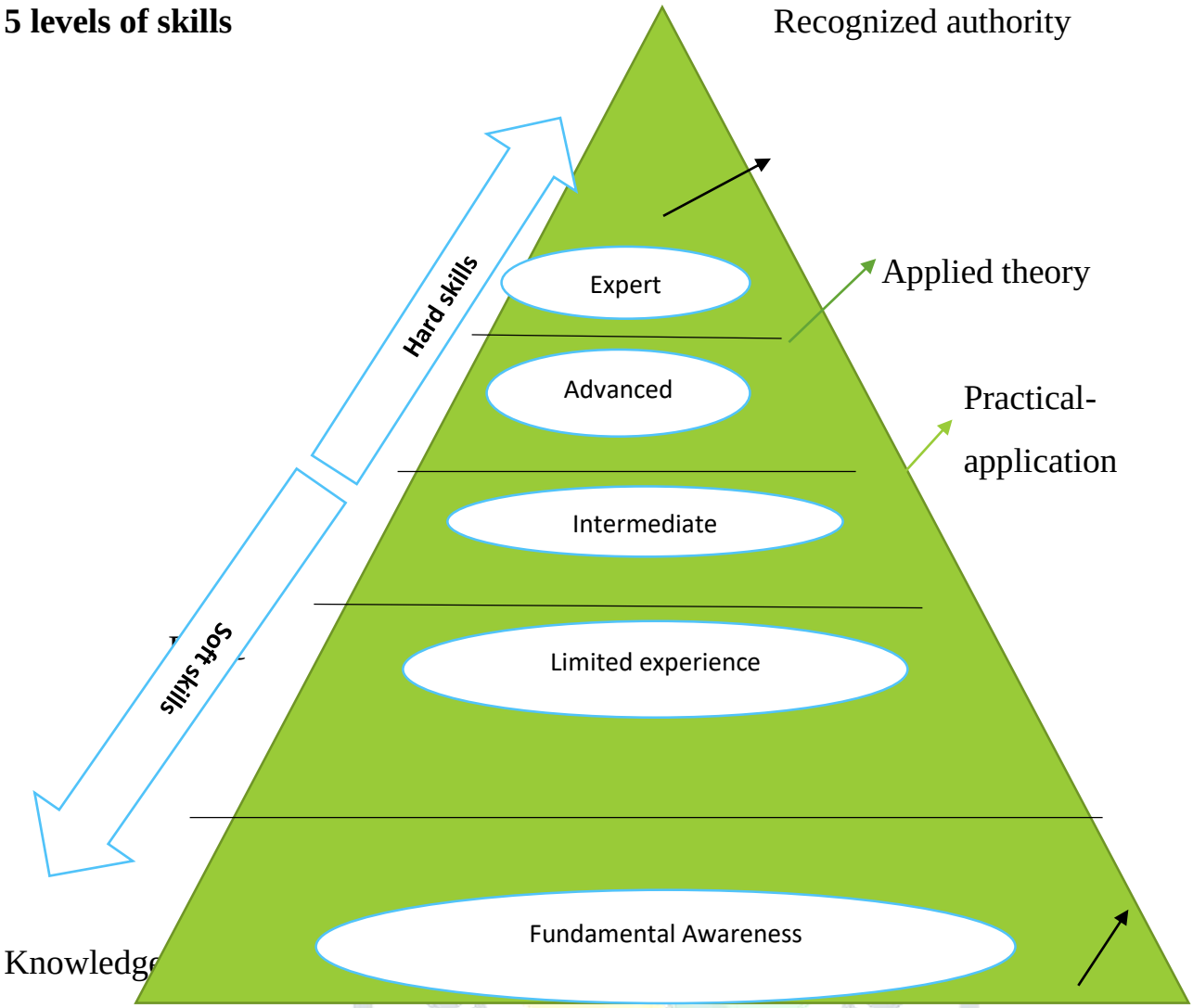
> *Close to 34 million persons were unemployed in Africa in 2019. Of these, 12.2 million were youth aged between 15–24 years (Annex 8). This was 6.4 million more than in 2010 and represents an increase of close to 1.5 million in the number of unemployed youth. The regional unemployment rate of 6.8 per cent was significantly higher than the world average of 5.0 per cent, implying that unemployment is a key labour market issue in Africa. Although unemployment is low, as mentioned, the majority of the employment found in Africa is informal.*

The above report support the argument that our curriculum should re reversed to include skills and proper mapping should be done to remove clutter, redundancy and misalignment of higher education curriculum with economic indices for the Sub-Saharan region especially for Higher Education. The report is self-explanatory.

SKILLS

Skill is the ability to do something well, expertise, dexterity, competence efficiency, professionalism. Skills require special training and knowledge. Skill is therefore an ability and capacity acquired through deliberate, systematic effort to carryout complex activities or jobs involving ideas (cognitive skills), things, (technical skills) or people (inter-personal skills). (Web Finance Inc, 2018). There are five levels of skill development.

5 levels of skills



Types of skills

Soft Skills are innate abilities usually related to how we interact with those around us, while **hard skills** are job specific or technical that must be learned through education or training**.**

Some of **the most important types of hard and soft skills below**:

Hard Skills	**Soft Skills**
Accounting	Adaptability
Copywriting	Amiability
Data Presentation	Collaboration
Foreign Languages	Communication
Mobile Development	Creativity

Hard Skills	Soft Skills
SEO/SEM Marketing	Critical Thinking
Software Development	Emotional Intelligence
Statistical Analysis	Leadership
UX/UI Design	Organization
Web Development	Time Manage

Source:ResumeGenius; from https://resumegenius.com/how-to-write-a-resume/skills-section-writing-guide

Problem statement

Lewis (2013) said that in our world today the conventional wisdom is providing equal opportunity for entry for all young people and retaining them in school. In America and other parts of the world, the wisdom is emphasis on getting a college degree. This wisdom is good if it puts into consideration the importance of actual skill development and outcome-based learning. Lewis (2013) also emphasized that roughly one third (1\3) of all students graduating in higher education today have not acquired critical skills needed for sustaining their lives. This explains why many graduates from sub-Saharan Africa are not employed nor are they employable in any industry or organization. To join the skills debate, this paper will ask and seek to answer some questions;

- Should skills be integrated at all faculties level in higher education and to what extent?
- How can we integrate skills in higher education?
- What is the role of institution and government towards this integration?

Methodology

This paper utilized qualitative approach drawing from the philosophy of constructivism, transformative paradigm and knowledge claims. The focus of this research is a one phenomenon interpretation and will be collaborated with reviewed literature and critical experiential observation and deductions. It does not involve post-positivism.

Confronting skill gap in higher education

Irvine (2017) states that the bachelor's degree has become a virtual commodity and the law of economics must prevail to drive down its value as a differentiator. In her report, Irvine (2017) suggested curriculum mapping and assessment mapping to improve higher education and emphasis skills even in evaluation. This is not to say that skills alone are the problem, other

variables need to be reviewed, such as population growth, where many more students enroll in higher institutions in Sub-Saharan Africa every academic year.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, the need to develop technological competence was evident, and the privileged location for this feat will be throughout school life, from primary and secondary education to higher education. The pandemic has had a severe impact on education, establishing the importance of technological skills and the role that HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) can play in their development by their students.

Especially at this level, it was a quick change from face-to-face lectures to online learning. However, the crisis raises questions about the value offered by a university education, which includes educational content, but also networking and social opportunities. In this way, universities will need to reinvent their learning environments and should promote the development of technological skills in students and teachers. (OECD 2020).

According to the Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture (OEI) report 2020, the situation experienced, with the need to use the so-called emergency remote education, gave visibility to an unresolved problem, of using distance learning. It placed HEIs before the need to define priorities in terms of curricular content and to focus educational efforts on the competences and skills that are in fact essential in times of uncertainty. These skills include technological skills, but also soft skills that allow thinking, and understanding and transfer of knowledge, which contribute to personality development and promote students' intellectual autonomy. (OECD 2021)

Curriculum Mapping and assessment mapping

According to Reed et al (2018), curriculum mapping is a process of identifying where specific learning outcome-related content is taught. It answers the question of where? How often? and to what degree? Specific content can be presented to student in respect to relevance, transferability and practicability. It is also a process of indexing a curriculum to identify and address academic gaps, redundancies, and misalignment for the purpose of improving outcome in terms of skills development. Curriculum mapping includes three elements; content. Skill and evaluation(Massy & Wilger 1994).In the same study ,Massy and Wilger(1994) found that curriculum mapping increase teaching and learning cooperation and improves students engagement. Hale (2008) in his writings asserts that curriculum mapping leads to collaborative behavior among colleagues in education settings. For assessment, mapping is turning curriculum mapping on its side. It requires looking at the program in its entirety and holistically, rather than focusing on instructions, one maps where emphasis should be- where, how and how often students are assessed. It is better to focus on relevant skills especially on performance skills related to the study program. We have developed the ideology of "more is better" but more is not always better. Most contents on the curriculum seem to be fill-ups and not relevant to outcome.Strategic assessment should be the target to developing skills in high institutes. Strategic assessment is one based on expected outcomes, practicability, knowledge creation and

transfer, critical and creative thinking and practical institutional pedagogy. This is the main crux of this discourse.

SHOULD SKILLS BE INTERGRATED IN HIGHER EDUCATION?

Skill-based courses should be made more relevant and very attractive in higher education to increase employability. This answer is given by students taught by Dnyanopasak, Shimshon of Arts and Science College, Jintur district Parbhani. This answer is not different from answers gotten from students in college of education, open and distance learning in Kampala international University. A doctoral student from faculty of business studies Kampala international university emphatically said; "The reason to why sub-Saharan African states have coughing economy because our curriculum and syllabus are Eurocentric instead of Afrocentric in terms of exploring the potential skills of university students" Fallows and Steven (2000) emphasized that higher education should provide graduate with skills to operate professionally within the environment required for the "Learning age" or "Learning society". The UK national committee of inquiring into higher Education (Dearing Commission 1997) noted the need for institutions to develop each program in such a way that intended outcome of the program is achieved in terms of;

- Knowledge and understanding
- Key skills: communication, numeracy, use of information technology, and learning how to learn.
- Cognitive skills such as understanding methodologies or critical analysis.
- Subject specific skills such as, laboratory skills. (Fallow and Steven 2000)

Skill integration in higher institutions-How?

Institutions can ensure that skills are embedded within the curriculum by providing for skill development in all their programs. According to Fallow and Steven (2000), a single set of skills expectations should be added to courses irrespective of primary discipline. He proposed **4 models viz;**

- Embedded system
- Specific set of recognized descriptors
- Standard scheme versus program tuned to discipline requirements
- Assessment of skills (Recognized skills versus skills formally assessed)

There is no universal or specific skill development model. Usually Faculties choose what is best suited at a point in time with respect to resource availability, political will and societal need. Computer age and globalization have necessitated the inclusion of computer basics across all discipline.

Mawson (2011) asserts that one way to converts our talks into action is to learn by doing, much of the debates about building sustainable development is by redevelopment which starts by putting into actions all those policies. A skilled workforce is essential for sub-Saharan Africa economic transformation. Failure of government to invest in skills development impedes

economic growth and affects skill acquisition; owing to the financial implications, portrayed by low or poor budgetary allocation to education.

According to Yaw and Tan (2016), all institutions should integrate skills by making their plans and purposes very flexible to meet employers immediate demand for skills particularly in the prospective growth sectors. In summary Fallow and Steven (2000), Mawson (2011), Yaw and Tan (2011) have confirmed that our institutions should not just integrate skills but ensure it is the core of all disciplines.

Conclusion and recommendations

The 21st century skills refers to transformation of classroom strategies and curriculum to shape students in preparation to meeting increasing demands of fast evolving world. In education industry. We should develop a comprehensive framework of amalgamation of skills, knowledge and support systems capable of meeting demands of 21st century. Pedagogical paradigms in higher education can do the following;

- incorporate 21st century standards and skills demands into the curriculum
- develop a forum for faculty to discuss ways of incorporating 21st century skills into all course units
- identify where transferable skills appear in the curriculum by curriculum mapping
- re-evaluate the methods formally used in assessment and incorporate outcome based, practical and non-formal assessment methods

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