Descriptive Statistical Metrics Of Graduates' Employaility Exposure Activities In Nigerian Higher Education Institutions

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Abstract: Graduates' skills mismatch and employability is a persistent concern in Nigeria, raising questions about the extent to which higher education institutions prepare students for the world of work. This study examined the extent to which Nigerian higher education institutions expose graduates to employability activities that prepare them for the world of work and was guided by Functional Context Theory. Using a non-experimental design of descriptive survey research type, data were collected from 1109 graduates representing 80 higher education institutions in Nigeria through questionnaire titled Graduates' Employability Exposure Activities Scale (GEEA) covering 40 employability exposure activities. Data were analysed using R software (version 3.4.0) to obtain the frequencies and percentages. Findings revealed that graduates were exposed to employability activities to a large extent, with many activities recording high levels of exposure. Project management (46.8%), group-based assignments (44.3%), team projects (43.8%), extra-curricular activities (42.4%), and internet research (41.9%) were experienced to a very great extent. However, moderate exposure was observed in several critical work-related activities, including peer mentoring (22.1%), interaction with work-placement agencies (20.5%), skills portfolio development (20.5%), innovation hubs (19.9%), community engagement projects (18.6%), and part-time work experience (18.2%). These findings indicate variation in the intensity of graduates' exposure to employability activities. The study concludes that while Nigerian higher education institutions increasingly prioritise employability development, disparities remain in the depth and distribution of exposure to industry-linked and reflective activities. The study recommends institutionalisation of employability practices, strengthened university–industry partnerships, and policy benchmarks to ensure equitable graduate preparation for the labour market.

Key word: Higher education, Employability exposure activities, Graduates' employability

INTRODUCTION

Across contemporary higher education systems, the focus on graduates' employability has intensified due to rising unemployment, skills mismatch, and the increasing complexity of modern workplaces. Higher education institutions are no longer viewed solely as centres for knowledge transmission but as strategic platforms for preparing individuals for productive participation in the labour market. In this context, structured employability exposure activities such as internships, industrial attachments, career mentoring, skills workshops, entrepreneurship training, and service-learning have become central components of institutional strategies to bridge the gap between academic learning and workplace readiness. Understanding the extent and patterns of graduates' exposure to these activities is essential for evaluating the responsiveness of higher education systems to labour market demands, particularly in developing economies such as Nigeria.

In Nigeria, the challenge of graduate unemployment and underemployment has generated growing concern among policymakers, employers, and educational stakeholders, as labour markets increasingly demand skills that many graduates lack [1], [6]. Unemployment according to [13], is viewed as a situation of actively searching for a job even with the needed prerequisite but currently being unemployed. [11] defined unemployed as persons that are ill-equipped, unable to add value, showing no evidence of perseverance, and willingness/abilities to learn. While Nigerian higher education institutions have increasingly embedded employability-oriented initiatives into their programmes, evidence suggests that these interventions are hampered by structural, curriculum, and institutional barriers, resulting in uneven quality and access across disciplines and institutions [3], [1]. Many graduates still struggle with the transition from school to work due to persistent gaps between academic training and workplace expectations, indicating variability in both access to and quality of employability exposure activities during their period of study [7]. A systematic, data-driven examination of descriptive statistical patterns of these exposures is therefore necessary to inform institutional reforms, curriculum redesign, and evidence-based policy interventions targeted at improving graduate employability outcomes in Nigerian higher education.

Recent research such as [12] defined employability as an individual's ability to gain, maintain, and contribute effectively in the workplace based on their skills, qualifications, and suitability for the job. [5] and [8] have conceptualised employability as a multidimensional construct shaped by skills development, experiential learning, and contextual engagement. [5] argued that employability emerges from the interaction between institutional practices and students' authentic engagement with work-related experiences. [8] similarly emphasised that structured exposure to real-world learning environments strengthens graduates' career adaptability and occupational identity.

Empirical evidence indicates that employability exposure activities contribute significantly to graduate employability outcomes. [9] reported that participation in internships and work-integrated learning improves graduates' professional competencies, communication skills, career self-efficacy, and employment prospects. Students who engaged in internships, volunteering, and career development programmes exhibited stronger employment outcomes and higher confidence in transitioning into professional roles. In the Nigerian context, [19] have highlighted persistent gaps between university training and labour market expectations, underscoring the need for more structured and equitably distributed employability exposure opportunities. In Nigeria, disparities in the provision and quality of employability exposure activities remain a major concern. [2] observed that weak higher education institutions–industry linkages limit students' access to meaningful work-based learning opportunities. [14] reported that institutional resource gaps shape unequal exposure to internships, industrial training, and entrepreneurship education across Nigerian higher education institutions.

This study is theoretically anchored in the Functional Context Theory developed by Thomas G. Sticht. The theory posits that learning is most effective when it is situated within the functional contexts of learners' everyday activities, enabling the transfer of classroom knowledge to practical tasks. According to [16] skills are not developed in isolation but are strengthened through practical engagement, meaningful tasks, and contextualised problem-solving activities. In the context of higher education, employability exposure activities such as internships, project-based learning, simulations, and fieldwork align strongly with this theoretical perspective by creating functional learning environments where students can apply classroom-acquired knowledge to real-world challenges. This is shown in the diagram below:
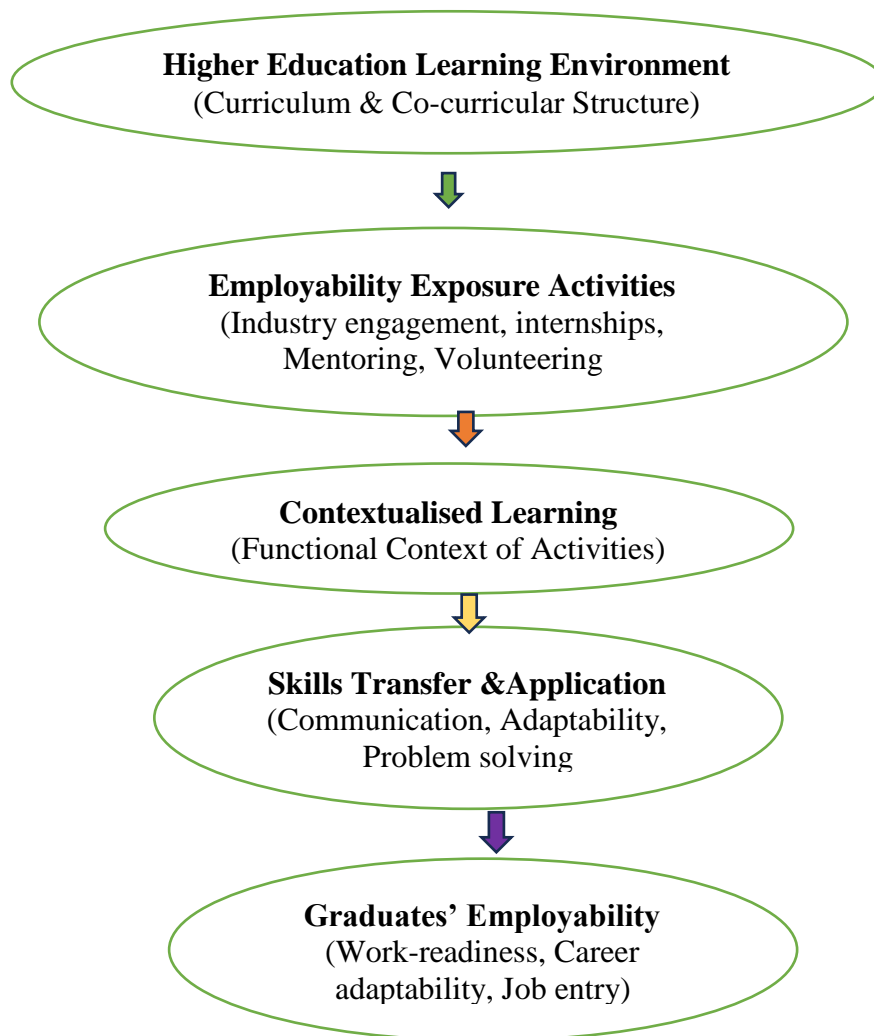

Higher Education Learning Environment
(Curriculum & Co-curricular Structure)

Employability Exposure Activities
(Industry engagement, internships, Mentoring, Volunteering

Contextualised Learning
(Functional Context of Activities)

Skills Transfer &Application
(Communication, Adaptability, Problem solving

Graduates' Employability
(Work-readiness, Career adaptability, Job entry)

Fig 1: Functional Context-Employability Exposure Framework
Source: *Adapted by James, M. U. (2025)*

Previous quantitative studies have increasingly utilised descriptive statistical techniques to examine patterns of students' participation in employability-related activities. [18] observed that frequencies, means, and dispersion measures provide critical insights into the accessibility and intensity of employability interventions across student populations. [5] similarly demonstrated that descriptive metrics reveal institutional disparities in in access to work-integrated learning. However, there remains a scarcity of large-scale, Nigeria-focused evidence-based insights that systematically documents the descriptive statistical distribution of graduates' exposure to employability activities across higher education institutions.

Against this backdrop, the study titled Descriptive Statistical Metrics of Graduates' Employability Exposure Activities in Nigerian Higher Education Institutions seeks to quantitatively examine the frequency, distribution, and variability of graduates' exposure to employability-focused activities experienced by graduates in Nigeria. By anchoring the study in Functional Context Theory and applying descriptive statistical techniques, the study aims to generate empirical evidence capable of informing how contextualised learning experiences shape graduate readiness for employment and how institutional practices and policy reforms can be optimised to enhance graduates' successful transition from higher education to the world of work.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. To what extent have tertiary institutions exposed graduates to activities that prepares them for the world of work?
2. How does the level of graduates' exposure to employability vary across respondents?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a non-experimental design of descriptive survey research type. The design was considered appropriate because it enables the systematic collection and numerical description of data on graduates' exposure to employability activities during their programmes in higher education institutions. The focus of the study was to quantify the extent and patterns of exposure rather than to establish causal relationships. The population comprised graduates of Nigerian higher education institutions who completed their programmes within the last four or five academic sessions. This group was considered suitable because they had sufficiently completed their academic programmes and could retrospectively report on the employability exposure activities they experienced during their period of study.

A multi-stage sampling procedure was employed to select respondents for the study. In the first stage, higher education institutions were stratified by type (federal, state, and private institutions). In the second stage, faculties were selected within each institution. In the final stage, graduates were selected using simple random sampling. A total sample of 1109 graduates was used for the study. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Graduates' Employability Exposure Activities Scale (GEEAS). The instrument consisted of two sections: Section A: Demographic information of respondents. Section B: Items measuring exposure to employability activities such as internships, industrial training, entrepreneurship courses, career workshops, project-based learning, mentoring, and volunteering. Responses were structured in a polytomous response format to enable easy computation of frequencies and percentages. The instrument was subjected to content and construct validity. Dimension reduction technique known as principal component analysis (PCA) was performed. This combines several variables into a smaller number of components that will represent the most important original information.

The objective of PCA is to reduce redundancy and meaningless noise in the dataset. PCA was employed on the graduate employability exposure activities. The goal of conducting the PCA in the study was to identify patterns on how respondents were exposed to those employability activities. The PCA was performed in the R programming language (version 3.4.0) using the principal component analysis ('principal') function of the Procedures for Psychological, Psychometric, and Personality Research ('psych') package (version 1.8.4). The adequacy of using PCA on the samples was confirmed using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test. Varimax orthogonal rotation method which helped to clarify PCA results and retained 9 components representing the original 16. Cronbach alpha was used to obtain reliability coefficient of r = (r=0.98) indicating that the instrument was reliable for data collection. The instrument was administered in printed form. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and participation was completely voluntary.

Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency and percentages) to determine the extent of graduates' exposure to employability activities. Results were presented using tables and charts to show patterns, distribution, and comparative levels of exposure across different activities. This analytical approach directly aligns with the objective of the study, which is to descriptively quantify graduates' exposure to employability activities in Nigerian higher education institutions.

Table 1: Graduates' Employability Exposure Activity during training

S/N	Exposure Activities	VGE	GE	M	LE	NAT
1	Career development workshops	488 (44.0)	308 (27.8)	163 (14.7)	39 (3.5)	111 (10)
2	Participation in competitive academic challenge	355 (32.0)	386 (34.8)	195 (17.6)	62 (5.6)	111 (10)
3	Volunteer	355 (32.0)	350 (31.6)	214 (19.3)	67 (6.0)	124 (11.1)

4	Field trip to industries in your field of specialty	389 (35.1)	292 (26.3)	205 (18.5)	66 (6.0)	157 (14.1)
5	Guest lectures	377 (34.0)	347 (31.3)	200 (18.0)	58 (5.2)	127 (11.5)
6	Independent research project	410 (37.0)	364 (32.8)	140 (12.6)	46 (4.1)	129 (14.4)
7	Internships and practicum placement	394 (35.5)	341 (30.7)	165 (14.9)	71 (6.4)	138 (12.5)
8	Participation in research project	405 (36.5)	379 (34.2)	174 (15.7)	30 (2.7)	121 (10.9)
9	Creating student skills portfolios	376 (33.9)	328 (29.6)	189 (17.0)	69 (6.2)	147 (13.2)
10	Situation analysis	290 (26.1)	395 (35.6)	215 (19.4)	76 (6.9)	133 (12)
11	Peer Mentoring	322 (29.0)	320 (28.9)	245 (22.1)	63 (5.7)	156 (14)
12	Student talk shows	311 (28.0)	374 (33.7)	182 (16.4)	95 (8.6)	147 (13.3)
13	Public speaking	397 (35.8)	292 (26.3)	183 (16.5)	110 (9.9)	127 (11.5)
14	Debates	333 (30.0)	331 (29.8)	190 (17.1)	97 (8.7)	158 (14.3)
15	Interaction with work placement agencies	281 (25.3)	355 (32.0)	227 (20.5)	99 (8.9)	147 (13.3)
16	Community engagement projects with reporting	304 (27.4)	337 (30.4)	206 (18.6)	82 (7.4)	180 (16.2)
17	Coursework and research training	423 (38.1)	318 (28.7)	168 (15.1)	66 (6.0)	134 (12.1)
18	Oral presentation	456 (41.1)	299 (27.0)	163 (14.7)	48 (4.3)	143 (12.9)
19	Group-based assignment	491 (44.3)	320 (28.9)	145 (13.1)	28 (2.5)	125 (11.3)
20	Student association	418 (37.7)	327 (29.5)	191 (17.2)	46 (4.1)	127 (11.5)
21	Team project	486 (43.8)	334 (30.1)	150 (13.5)	25 (2.3)	114 (10.3)
22	Conflict resolution session	334 (30.1)	326 (29.4)	226 (20.4)	84 (7.6)	139 (12.5)
23	Peer assessment	360 (32.5)	318 (28.7)	202 (18.2)	83 (7.5)	146 (13.2)
24	Group reflection sessions	321 (28.9)	351 (31.7)	206 (18.6)	72 (6.5)	156 (14.1)
25	Extra-curricular activities (school teams, sport)	470 (42.4)	309 (27.9)	157 (14.2)	41 (3.7)	132 (11.9)
26	Innovation hubs	300 (27.1)	358 (32.3)	221 (19.9)	82 (7.4)	148 (13.3)
27	Lectures from industrialists	319 (28.8)	312 (28.1)	240 (21.6)	101 (9.1)	137 (12.3)
28	Adaptive skill acquisition programme	394 (35.5)	315 (28.4)	181 (16.3)	64 (5.8)	155 (14)
29	Internet research	465 (41.9)	332 (29.9)	149 (13.4)	30 (2.7)	143 (12)
30	Online information retrieval	369 (33.3)	346 (31.2)	189 (17.0)	62 (5.6)	143 (12.9)
31	Hands-on financial training	288 (26.0)	365 (32.9)	187 (16.9)	100 (9.0)	169 (15.3)
32	Leadership training	411 (37.1)	335 (30.2)	173 (15.6)	56 (5.0)	134 (12.1)
33	Entrepreneurship	445 (40.1)	300 (27.1)	183 (16.5)	33 (3.0)	148 (13.3)
34	Project management (final year)	519 (46.8)	308 (27.8)	123 (11.1)	46 (4.1)	113 (10.2)
35	Learning and impact hub	384 (34.6)	342 (30.8)	177 (16.0)	59 (5.3)	147 (13.2)
36	Creating student skills portfolios (self-record)	333 (30.0)	325 (29.3)	227 (20.5)	75 (6.8)	149 (13.4)
37	Risk and return investment	279 (25.2)	319 (28.8)	206 (18.6)	127 (11.5)	178 (16.1)
38	Personal finance and budgeting workshops	272 (24.5)	336 (30.3)	194 (17.5)	107 (9.6)	200 (18.1)
39	Business plan competition	324 (29.2)	340 (30.7)	176 (15.9)	95 (8.6)	174 (15.6)
40	Part-time work experience	332 (29.9)	298 (26.9)	202 (18.2)	99 (8.9)	178 (16.1)
	Total	**33**	**30**	**16**	**12**	**9**

VGE=Very Great, GE=Great Extent, M=Moderate, LE=Large Extent, NAT=Not at all

The result indicate that tertiary institutions have exposed graduates to employability activities to a large extent. This is based on the consistently high percentages recorded under the Very Great and Great extent categories across most of the 40 employability activities examined. Activities such as project management, group-based assignments, team projects, oral presentations, entrepreneurship education, internet research, and extra-curricular activities recorded particularly high levels of exposure. The finding suggests that Nigerian higher education institutions are increasingly embedding employability-oriented activities within their curricula and co-curricular structures. This aligns with the argument by [5] that universities are progressively repositioning themselves as institutions responsible not only for academic knowledge transmission but also for developing graduates' work-related competencies. Similarly, [9] observed that structured learning activities such as teamwork, presentations, and project-based learning

are among the most common employability strategies adopted by higher education institution globally because they are relatively easy to integrate into existing curricula.

The high exposure to teamwork, group assignments, and project management activities also supports the position of [17], who argued that collaborative and problem-based learning environments enhance graduates' adaptability, communication skills, and workplace readiness. Furthermore, [20] found that frequent engagement in applied learning tasks strengthens graduates' confidence and perceived employability. However, despite the generally high exposure, the presence of Moderate, Low Extent, and Not at All responses across several items indicates that exposure is not uniform across all employability activities. This suggests that while employability development is prioritised, the depth and consistency of implementation vary across institutions and programmes.

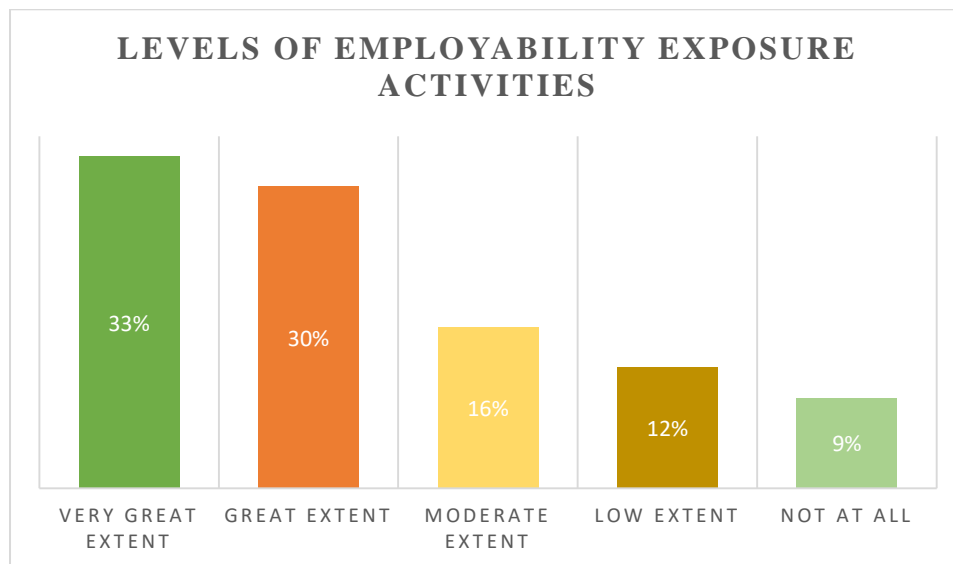**LEVELS OF EMPLOYABILITY EXPOSURE ACTIVITIES**

Fig 2: *Levels of Employability Exposure Activities*

The result as shown on the chart reveals clear variation in the level of exposure among graduates, particularly for certain categories of employability activities. While core academic-related activities (e.g., group projects, coursework-based research, oral presentations) recorded predominantly high exposure, several activities showed moderate levels of exposure among a substantial proportion of graduates. Specifically, activities such as peer mentoring, interaction with work-placement agencies, innovation hubs, volunteering, community engagement projects, conflict resolution sessions, skills portfolio development, lectures from industrialists, and field trips to industries recorded noticeable percentages under the Moderate extent category. This variation suggests that graduates' exposure to employability activities is influenced by institutional capacity, programme focus, and availability of external partnerships. The finding is consistent with [8] who noted that employability development opportunities are often unevenly distributed across student populations, with some students accessing richer experiences than others. [21] similarly reported that activities requiring strong higher education institutions–industry collaboration – such as placements, mentoring, and industry led engagements are more likely to show variability due to resource constraints and institutional networks.

The moderate exposure observed for innovation hubs and entrepreneurship-related initiatives reflects findings by [4], who argued that although innovation and enterprise education is widely promoted, access is often limited to specific faculties or motivated students rather than being universally embedded. Likewise, [10] found that reflective practices such as skills portfolios and peer assessment are inconsistently applied across programmes, despite strong evidence of their value for employability development.

Summarily, the variation in exposure levels suggests that while employability activities exist within Nigerian higher education institutions, not all graduates benefit equally, reinforcing the need for more systematic and inclusive implementation.

CONCLUSION
The study concludes that Nigerian tertiary institutions have made significant progress in exposing graduates to employability-enhancing activities, as evidenced by the high levels of participation reported for many academic and co-curricular practices. However, exposure is not evenly distributed across all employability activities, with several work-integrated, reflective, and industry-linked initiatives showing only moderate levels of engagement among graduates. These disparities highlight the need for more structured, inclusive, and context-driven employability strategies to ensure that all graduates are adequately prepared for the world of work. Grounded in Functional Context Theory, the findings underscore the importance of situating learning within authentic, real-world contexts to facilitate the effective transfer of skills from the classroom to professional environments. Based on the findings of

the study, it was recommended that: Higher education institutions should move beyond ad hoc employability initiatives and formally embed activities such as mentoring, industry engagement, and skills portfolio development into programme requirements. Institutions should develop sustainable partnerships with employers, professional bodies, and placement agencies to expand access to internships, industrial visits, and guest lectures. Policies should be put in place to ensure that employability activities are accessible to all students regardless of discipline or institutional type. Lecturers should be trained on how to integrate employability outcomes into teaching, assessment, and reflective learning practices. Institutions should regularly track graduates' exposure to employability activities using descriptive statistics to identify gaps and inform improvement strategies.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Practical Implications, the findings provide empirical evidence that can guide higher education institutions in strengthening employability-focused practices. The descriptive metrics reveal which employability activities are well established and which show only moderate exposure. Practically, universities can use these insights to redesign curricula by scaling underexposed activities such as peer mentoring, industry interaction, innovation hubs, and reflective portfolio development. Academic staff can also adopt more contextualised, activity-based teaching strategies that align classroom learning with real-world tasks, consistent with Functional Context Theory.

At the societal level, improved exposure to employability activities can enhance graduates' social integration, civic engagement, and economic participation. By strengthening activities such as volunteering, community engagement projects, and conflict resolution sessions, higher education institutions can contribute to the development of socially responsible and adaptable graduates. Improved employability outcomes also reduce graduate unemployment and underemployment, which has broader implications for social stability, poverty reduction, and youth inclusion in Nigeria.

For institutional administrators, the study offers a data-driven framework for decision-making. University management can use the findings to allocate resources more strategically, prioritising employability activities with moderate exposure but high labour-market relevance. The results also highlight the need for better coordination between academic units, career services, and industry liaison offices. Monitoring employability exposure using frequencies and percentages provides managers with a simple but effective performance-tracking tool for institutional quality assurance.

From a policy perspective, the study provides evidence to support the development of national guidelines on graduate employability exposure. Regulatory bodies and education ministries can use the findings to set minimum benchmarks for employability activities across tertiary institutions. Policies that encourage or mandate university–industry partnerships, structured work-integrated learning, and entrepreneurship education can help reduce disparities in graduate exposure. The study also supports policy reforms that emphasise outcome-based education and skills transfer, aligning higher education outputs with national development and labour market needs.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite its contributions, the study has some limitations. First, the study relied on self-reported data from graduates, which may be subject to recall bias or social desirability effects. Second, the use of descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages) limits the ability to establish causal relationships between employability exposure and labour market outcomes. Third, the study focused on exposure to employability activities without directly measuring employment status, job quality, or outcomes after graduation. Finally, institutional and disciplinary differences were not deeply explored, which may mask important contextual variations.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Future studies should employ inferential and multivariate analytical techniques to examine the relationship between employability exposure activities and actual graduate employment outcomes. Longitudinal designs could be used to track graduates from higher education institutions into the labour market to assess the long-term effects of employability exposure. Further research should also explore discipline-specific and institution-type differences in employability exposure. Qualitative studies involving employers, academic staff, and graduates could provide deeper insights into the quality and effectiveness of employability activities. Additionally, future studies may integrate psychosocial and life skills variables such as resilience, adaptability, and self-efficacy to provide a more holistic understanding of graduate employability development.

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