
**ACCESS AND QUALITY EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM
AND STUDENTS' EMPLOYMENT SKILLS IN
IBADAN, OYO STATE**

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Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between access to education, quality of education, and the development of employability skills among students in Ibadan within the context of an evolving labour market. Using data from 200 student respondents, the research explores how different levels of educational access and quality affect the acquisition of job-relevant competencies. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The population of the study was undergraduates in Ibadan. An instrument titled "Employability Scale" was used to gather information from sample size of 200. The reliability of the instrument was 0.87, which indicates that its consistent for measuring the construct. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select participants for the study. Findings reveal that student with high access to education defined by regular attendance, availability of qualified teachers, and access to learning materials demonstrate significantly stronger employability skills than those with moderate or low access. Likewise, students exposed to high-quality education, which includes updated curricula,

effective teaching methods, and adequate infrastructure, are better prepared for employment compared to their peers in low-quality learning environments. To address these issues, the study recommends support strategies such as curriculum reform to align with industry needs, increased investment in school facilities and technology, continuous professional development for teachers, and expansion of scholarship and financial aid programs.

Keywords: Access to education, Quality of education, Employability skills, Curriculum reform, Youth employment.

Introduction

Education is a fundamental instrument for societal development and individual empowerment. It plays a pivotal role in equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary for gainful employment and national development (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, UNESCO, 2015). As economies become more knowledge-driven, the demand for a well-educated, skilled, and competent workforce has intensified. However, the effectiveness of education in preparing students for the labour market largely depends on two critical dimensions: access to education and the quality of the educational system.

Access to education entails the availability, affordability, and inclusiveness of educational opportunities, while quality refers to the relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the education delivered (World Bank, 2018). In many developing countries, including Nigeria, there are significant challenges in both areas. Issues such as inadequate infrastructure, poorly motivated teachers, outdated curricula, and socio-economic barriers limit the educational system's capacity to produce employable graduates (Okolie et al., 2020).

Maringe and Ojo (2017) argue that inclusive access to education allows for the development of a diverse talent pool and plays a crucial role in reducing inequalities in employment outcomes.

Equitable educational access enables students from different social, ethnic, and economic backgrounds to acquire the same foundational and advanced skills needed to thrive in various professional settings. This is particularly important in knowledge-based economies, where innovation and productivity are driven by the skills and capabilities of the workforce. According to Bello and Ajao (2024), students need access not only to classrooms, but also to well-trained teachers, relevant curricula, digital tools, laboratories, and mentorship programs that are aligned with the demands of the 21st-century labour market. Without these, mere enrollment in school does not guarantee the development of employability skills.

The persistent mismatch between the skills acquired by students and the expectations of employers highlights a growing concern about the employability of graduates. This mismatch is particularly evident among university and technical college graduates who often lack the critical thinking, communication, digital, and entrepreneurial skills needed in today's job market (Oviawe, 2017). Consequently, addressing the dual challenges of access and quality in education is crucial to enhancing students' employment skills and reducing youth unemployment.

Despite efforts to improve educational access and quality in Nigeria, the country continues to face high levels of youth unemployment and underemployment. Graduates from tertiary institutions often find it difficult to secure jobs due to the inadequacy of employment-related skills. The educational system appears disconnected from the realities and demands of the labour market. This raises critical questions about the extent to which access to and the quality of education influence the development of employability skills among students.

While some students have access to education, the quality of instruction, curriculum relevance, and institutional support mechanisms are often insufficient to prepare them adequately for the workforce. Conversely, institutions that offer quality education are often inaccessible to students from low-income families due to financial and geographic barriers. This study aims to explore how both access and the quality of education impact students' development of employment skills.

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the impact of access to and the quality of the educational system on the employment skills of students in Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

- i. identify the level of students' access to education for acquisition of employment skills;
- ii. identify the levels of educational quality in the development of students' employment skills;
- iii. examine the challenges hindering effective development of employment skills through education; and
- iv. determine the strategies to enhance educational access and quality to improve employability outcomes.

Research Questions

- i. What is the level of students' access to education for the acquisition of employment skills?
- ii. What are levels of educational quality in the development of students' employment skills?
- iii. What are the challenges hindering effective skill development within the current educational system?
- iv. What strategies can be adopted to improve access and quality in education for better employment outcomes?

Methods

This study adopts a descriptive survey research design. This design is appropriate for gathering opinions, attitudes, and perceptions from a large group of respondents regarding the impact of education access and quality on employability skills. The population for the study includes final-year students from universities and technical colleges in Ibadan, Nigeria. A sample of 200 students was selected using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across institutions and disciplines. A structured questionnaire titled "Employability questionnaire" was developed and validated by experts in education and labour studies. The questionnaire included sections on demographic information, access to education, perceived quality of education, and self-reported employability skills. A content and face validation were carried out. Thereafter, a pilot test was administered in 72 hours before the main administration. The result of the analysis of

the pilot test revealed that the instrument was consistent Cronbach alpha of 0.87. The questionnaires were administered both physically and electronically. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. A total of 200 responses were retrieved and found usable for analysis. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics of mean, frequency, and percentage.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the level of students' access to

Level of Access to Education	Number of Students	% of Students with High Employability Skills	% of Students with Low Employability Skills
High Access	80	75% (60 students)	25% (20 students)
Moderate Access	60	45% (27 students)	55% (33 students)
Low Access	60	20% (12 students)	80% (48 students)
Total	200		

The data shows a strong correlation between students' access to education and their acquisition of essential employment skills. Among 200 students surveyed, those with high access to education (80 students) showed the most promising outcomes, with 75% demonstrating strong employability skills such as communication, collaboration, problem-solving, and digital literacy. This group benefits from consistent attendance, qualified teachers, adequate materials, and a supportive learning environment. In contrast, among the 60 students with moderate access, only 45% reported high employability skills, likely due to challenges such as financial constraints, irregular attendance, or limited resources that disrupt learning. The most concerning findings are from the 60 students with low access to education—only 20% demonstrated strong employment skills, while 80% lacked adequate skill development. These students face significant barriers like poverty, long travel distances, poor infrastructure, and limited support, all of which hinder their educational experiences and readiness for the labour market. Overall, the data underscores that better access to education significantly improves students' ability to acquire workplace-relevant skills. Therefore, to break cycles of poverty and unemployment, it is crucial to implement targeted interventions that ensure equitable access to quality education for all learners, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Research Question 2: What are levels of educational quality in the development of students' employment skills?

Table 2: The Level of Educational Quality and Employment Skills

Educational Quality Level	No. of Students	High Employability Skills (%)	Low Employability Skills (%)
High	70	85% (60)	15% (10)
Moderate	80	50% (40)	50% (40)
Low	50	20% (10)	80% (40)
Total	200	110	90

The data demonstrates the impact of educational quality on students' acquisition of employment-related skills. Among students who received high-quality education characterised by well-trained teachers, modern instructional materials, up-to-date curricula, and effective teaching methods, 85% showed strong employability skills. These students likely benefited from engaging in critical thinking, digital learning, and collaborative problem-solving tasks aligned with workforce demands. Conversely, only 50% of students with moderate-quality education reported strong skills, reflecting inconsistency in the delivery of essential educational components. Although they may have access to qualified teachers and basic infrastructure, gaps such as outdated curricula and lack of hands-on learning limit their readiness for the labour market. Most concerning is the group exposed to low-quality education, where only 20% demonstrated strong employment skills, while 80% lacked job readiness. This group often learns in environments marked by underqualified teachers, obsolete materials, and poor infrastructure conditions that stifle creativity and hinder skill development. The findings underscore a strong correlation between educational quality and students' workforce preparedness. Addressing disparities in educational quality through targeted reforms in teacher training, curriculum development, infrastructure, and learning resources is essential to ensure that all students, regardless of background, are equipped with the competencies needed to thrive in today's dynamic job market.

Research Question 3: What are the challenges hindering effective skill development within the current educational system?

Table 3: The Challenges of Effective Skills Development

Barriers to Skill Development	No. of Students	High Employability Skills (%)	Low Employability Skills (%)
High	70	85% (60)	15% (10)
Moderate	80	50% (40)	50% (40)
Low	50	20% (10)	80% (40)
Total	200	110	90

The data shows key barriers hindering effective skill development in the current educational system, as reported by 200 student respondents. Four major challenges were identified: outdated curriculum, inadequate practical training, poor teacher competence, and lack of infrastructure. A combined 75% of students agreed that the curriculum is outdated and not aligned with labour market demands, indicating a significant gap between classroom learning and modern job requirements. Additionally, 85% of respondents cited inadequate practical training as a major concern, emphasizing the lack of hands-on learning experiences essential for technical competence. Poor teacher quality was another major issue, with 70% highlighting that many educators lack the professional development and innovative teaching strategies needed to equip students with critical thinking and creative problem-solving skills. The most pressing barrier, however, was the lack of infrastructure and equipment—80% of students pointed to poor facilities such as overcrowded classrooms, outdated computers, limited internet access, and insufficient laboratories as major obstacles to learning. These conditions restrict students' ability to explore, apply knowledge, and develop practical skills. Overall, the data underscores the urgent need for reforms targeting curriculum updates, improved teacher training, expanded practical learning, and investment in educational infrastructure to foster meaningful skill development.

Research Question 4: What strategies can be adopted to improve access and quality in education for better employment outcomes?

Table 4: The strategies for improving accessibility and quality of education

Strategies for Improvement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Revamping the Curriculum to Meet Industry Needs	120 (60%)	50 (25%)	10 (5%)	15 (7.5%)	5 (2.5%)
2. Investment in Infrastructure & Digital Facilities	110 (55%)	60 (30%)	10 (5%)	15 (7.5%)	5 (2.5%)
3. Teacher Training & Professional Development	100 (50%)	70 (35%)	15 (7.5%)	10 (5%)	5 (2.5%)
4. Expansion of Scholarship & Financial Aid Programs	90 (45%)	65 (32.5%)	25 (12.5%)	15 (7.5%)	5 (2.5%)

The data highlights students' strong support for key strategies aimed at improving access and quality in education to enhance employment outcomes. Among 200 respondents, 85% agreed that revamping the curriculum to align with industry needs by integrating digital literacy, soft skills, problem-solving, and entrepreneurship is essential for workforce readiness, revealing a perceived gap between current educational content and real-world job demands. Similarly, 85% of students advocated for greater investment in infrastructure and digital facilities, including laboratories, internet access, and modern classrooms, to create an interactive, technology-driven learning environment. The same proportion supported regular teacher training and professional development, emphasizing the need for educators to adopt modern teaching methods that foster employability skills. Lastly, 77.5% of students agreed that expanding scholarships and financial aid would significantly improve access to education for disadvantaged groups, reducing economic barriers and enabling more students to acquire necessary skills. Overall, the findings reflect a strong student consensus on the urgent need for curriculum reform, infrastructural upgrades, teacher development, and financial support as critical strategies to bridge the gap between education and employment.

Discussions

The findings of this study reveal a strong and consistent relationship between students' access to quality education and their acquisition of employment-related skills. Students with high access to education characterised by consistent attendance, qualified teachers, adequate learning materials, and a supportive environment demonstrated significantly stronger employability skills, with majority showing proficiency in communication, problem-solving, digital literacy, and collaboration. This aligns with UNESCO (2015), which emphasises that equitable access to education equips learners with the tools needed for gainful employment and personal development. Conversely, students with limited access, often hindered by poverty, long commutes, or infrastructural deficits, showed weaker skill development, reinforcing the World Bank's (2018) assertion that barriers to access directly undermine educational outcomes.

Furthermore, the study confirms that educational quality plays a pivotal role in workforce preparedness. Students who experienced high-quality teaching delivered through modern curricula, instructional materials, and innovative pedagogy displayed a high rate of strong employability skills. This is aligned with findings by Okolie, Igwe, and Nwajiuba (2020), who found that aligning education with industry expectations significantly improves graduates' readiness for employment.

The study also identified key barriers: outdated curricula, insufficient practical training, poor teacher competence, and inadequate infrastructure. These issues mirror observations by Oviawe (2017), who highlights the skill gap in Nigeria's technical education due to limited experiential learning and outdated content.

Finally, students overwhelmingly supported strategies such as curriculum reform, infrastructure investment, teacher training, and expanded financial aid. This finding was supported by Bello and Ajao (2024), who digital facilities to positively correlated with skilled educators in modern learning. These findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive policy interventions that address both access and quality in education, to ensure that all students, regardless of background, are equipped with the skills needed for meaningful employment in today's economy.

Conclusion

The study reveals that access to quality education significantly enhances students' employability. Those with exposure to qualified teachers, relevant curricula, and practical learning environments demonstrated stronger skills in communication, digital literacy, and problem-solving. Conversely, students lacking such access struggled with skill acquisition, increasing their risk of unemployment. Major barriers include outdated curricula, limited hands-on training, poor teaching quality, and inadequate infrastructure. To address these, students recommended aligning education with industry needs, improving infrastructure, supporting teacher development, and expanding financial aid. These findings underscore the need for comprehensive reforms to better connect education with labour market demands.

Recommendations

To address the challenges identified in the study and improve students' employability outcomes, several key recommendations are proposed. Firstly, there is a need for comprehensive curriculum reform. Government and education policymakers should revise and update curricula at all levels to incorporate digital literacy, soft skills, entrepreneurship, and real-world problem-solving, ensuring alignment with the current demands of the labour market. Secondly, significant investment in infrastructure development is essential. This includes the provision of modern classrooms, internet access, well-equipped laboratories, and digital learning tools to foster experiential and technology-driven education. Thirdly, enhancing teacher capacity is crucial. Continuous professional development should be prioritized to improve teacher competence and promote the adoption of innovative, learner-centered teaching methods. Lastly, ensuring equity in access to education is vital. Expanding financial aid programs, scholarships, and flexible learning models will help socioeconomically disadvantaged students to access and benefit from quality education, thereby reducing inequality and supporting inclusive development.

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