UNIVERSITY-INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS FOR ACHIEVING DECENT EMPLOYMENT IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

The study investigated University-industry partnerships as a tool for achieving decent employment in Rivers State. Three research questions were answered and three hypotheses tested in the study. Descriptive survey design was employed in the study. The population of the study was all 2,849 lecturers in the three public Universities in Rivers State and all employers in the private sector in Rivers State. There were 351 lecturers and 384 employers sampled for the study using convenience sampling technique which totaled 735 sampled respondents. Instrument used for data collection was a 15 item questionnaire titled "University-Industry Partnerships for Decent Employment Questionnaire" (UIPDEQ) which was face and content validated by three Measurement and Evaluation experts in the Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, University of Port Harcourt. Cronbach alpha was used to estimate the reliability of the questionnaire and it produced an index of 0.84. All the questionnaires were administered and recovered appropriately due to the ease of sampling. Research questions raised were answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested using z-test at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the study showed that management system and level of mutual reward were the major determinants of University industry partnerships. It was also revealed that this partnership can promote job mobility and business startup. However, challenges identified included lack of funding, inadequate technology and so on. The study recommended the need for regular stakeholders' engagement between the University and captains of industry for the achievement of decent employment.

Keywords: *University, Industry, Employment, Partnerships, Rivers State*

Introduction

The desire of every graduate is to secure employment after graduation. However, with several thousands of graduates passing out of the several tertiary institutions in the country, finding a decent employment that can take care of the social and economic needs of these graduates has remained an upheaval tasks due to the slow creation of job opportunities as a result of the gap between the need of industries and the production from these tertiary institutions. According to Tumuti et al., (2013) links between universities and industry have grown to be one of the top priorities for higher education policy, as well as for the national and institutional economies. However, the benefits have remained slow as revealed in the poor employment condition of most graduates who are either unemployed, underemployed or not satisfied with their job.

Furthermore, Joseph (2016) discovered a discrepancy in the skills of job seekers compared to what employers were looking for, indicating that workforce training has to be more closely matched with the competencies and skills needed for employment if graduates must have decent employment. The issue of decent employment has been a major concern for several decades as postulated by the International Labour Organization (ILO) since 1919 and this is because decent work is the sum total of one's aspiration, opportunity, income, right, personal development and so on (Pereira et al., 2019). Industries and Universities must therefore synergize to ensure that this objective is achieved in the interest of all.

Decent employment remains a human right issue (Blustein et al., 2016) which focuses on four key components namely; employment conditions, social security, rights at the workplace, and social dialog (Zu, 2013) and more than ever before, it is increasingly important for those supplying and demanding for skills in the labour market to ensure that there is equilibrium in such a way that workers are engaged in decent employment as this is important also for the growth and development of the nation. The failure to achieve this will have several social and economic implications on all.

Statement of the Problem

Achieving equilibrium in the demand and supply of labour is important for getting decent wages, jobs and work condition that contributes to decent work environment. Unfortunately, for several decades, the labour market has suffered from both shortages and surplus of skills which has made it difficult for workers to enjoy any form of decent employment. The discrepancies between the need of the industries and the supplies from tertiary institutions including the Universities has been an issue of worry among relevant stakeholders as this has hindered sustainable growth and development. It therefore appears that the Universities and industries are at variance as regards the supply and demand for skills. It is therefore important to examine the factors responsible for this discrepancies, the implications of this lacuna as well as strategies for bridging the gap for the achievement of decent employment among workers and sustainable growth and development in the long run.

Literature Review

The desire of every graduate is to work in an environment where their social and economic needs can be met comfortably. However, one of the factors that determine this is when the need for and supply of labour is at equilibrium. This is because when supply is more than demand, the price of labour will be low resulting to poor wages and when the demand is more than the supply, the price will be higher but sometimes resulting to very hectic work conditions. Therefore, amidst the current economic challenges, employees are further faced with the need to get decent employment that can make them more productive for themselves and the nation as a whole but this will require a balance between the needs and activities of the industries and the educational institutions particularly the Universities where majority of these students are concentrated.

According to Zu (2013) the desire of every worker vis-a-vis their goals for their careers are summed up in decent employment. This includes opportunities for productive work that pays fairly, job security and social protection for families, improved opportunities for social integration and personal growth, the freedom to organize and take part in life-affecting decisions, equality of opportunity, and treatment whether for the men or the women. However, this is possible when the industries are creating the needed jobs and the universities are supplying the required skills both in the right quality and quantity.

Over the years, the government has continued to initiate different policies to ensure that workers have decent employment by intervening through programmes and policies in the activities of educational institutions and the industries. The incompatibility of the research agenda with the needs of the market or local enterprises, difficulties with transactions and orientation, institutional restraints on employment in the public and civil sectors, low technological capacity of industries, a workforce lacking in skill, and financial obstacles remain some of the main obstacles to these policy initiatives (Boahin, 2018). There is therefore the need for further interventions that will help to close this gap for the benefit of workers so as to also make them productive agents who will contribute to national growth and development.

On their part, Adegbile et al., (2021) pointed out that industry-university relationships are more relevant now because universities must increasingly commercialize academic knowledge in addition to their two traditional primary objectives of research and teaching. This means that higher educational institutions including the Universities must rise up to the challenge of meeting the needs of the industries and the industries must also continue to create jobs for the teeming graduates produced from these educational institutions. This will go a long way in providing decent employment for these graduates. However, issues around the absence of adequately trained researchers, a deficient research infrastructure, insufficient research funding, and donor-influenced research agendas must be addressed for any gain to be recorded.

Cohen, Florida and Goe, as cited in Othman (2011) revealed that when universities and industries participate in university-industry engagement, both parties can profit either immediately or over time as the introduction of new products and processes as well as the enhancement of current ones are two important results of this interaction. This

will have positive effect on the employment of graduates and make them agents of positive change in their immediate environment.

Empirical Reviews

The need for collaboration between Universities and the industry has been a major issue that has informed several educational research activities by educational scholars. Aloysius et al., (2018) conducted a study on enhancing university's and industry's employability-collaboration among Nigeria graduates in the labor market. In this study, a qualitative research design was used. The study employed a phenomenological case study methodology, utilizing purposive sampling. The total number of participants in the study was thirty (30). The study's conclusions showed that theory-based instruction has a greater impact on learning than practical instruction when it comes to knowledge transfer, which has a direct impact on knowledge transfer in the workplace. According to the study, there is a "skills mismatch" since university-trained individuals' applications of their knowledge are not marketable.

On their part, Shewakena and Belay (2017) conducted a study on the role of university-industry linkage to produce graduates with employable skills through an analysis of banking and finance graduates' attributes from educators and industries perspective. An embedded mixed-methods research design was used. The lottery system and simple random sampling technique were used to choose the sample, which consisted of 73 teachers and 76 industrial workers. The primary tool for gathering data was a questionnaire, with a reliability estimate coefficient of α=0.81. The non-directional independent sample (two-sample) t-test was used to find the mean difference between the replies from the two independent groups (industrial personnel and instructors). A comparison was made between the industry employees' mean responses and the instructors' mean about the professional knowledge, talents, and ethics of banking and finance graduates. Therefore, there was no statistically significant mean difference found.

Furthermore, Ibeme (2020) investigated the effect of university-industry linkages on commercialization of innovations of higher education with evidence from Enugu State, South-East Nigeria. The study used a descriptive survey research design. Primary data from the five sample units were gathered using a questionnaire consisting of 19 closed-ended items with a 5-point Likert-type scale. According to the reliability test results, the aforementioned research instrument had a Cronbach's Alpha Index of 0.84. The University of Nigeria Nsukka, the Enugu State University of Science and Technology, the National Open University of Nigeria, the Enugu State Government, and the Nigerian Breweries Plc. Ama Plant were among the sample units. Using Cochran's finite population correction technique, a sample of 353 respondents was selected from the 4,281 total population for the study. Purposive sampling was employed to identify survey target respondents, meaning that only employees of the units sampled who had solid understanding of the problems associated with university-industry ties were included in the sample. The data arising from the coding of respondents' responses was analyzed using descriptive statistics, which included frequency counts, tables, and percentages. The four study hypotheses were tested using Multiple Regression Analysis. The study discovered that the number of intellectual property rights sold or purchased was significantly impacted by government regulations,

and the number of scientific conferences or training sessions funded by the government or businesses was significantly impacted by human resource development.

Similarly, Czako et al., (2021) conducted a related study on understanding intentions towards seeking university-business partnerships by analyzing four European cases. Three hypotheses were examined in the study, which used grounded theory as its methodology. Data hubs were taken out of institutional communications and combined with inputs of regional economic data. Grounded theory is a revolutionary approach that facilitates complicated observation. Though ideas of successful collaborations vary each institution, the survey found two opposing viewpoints on how to manage effective university-business collaborations. There were measurable reciprocal effects between the local industrial environment's structure, research output, and university-business interactions. These studies indicated the need for more collaboration for the partnership between Universities and the industry to translate to economic benefits for all.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study was to investigate University-industry partnerships as a tool for achieving decent employment in Rivers State. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. find out the factors influencing University-industry partnerships for decent employment in Rivers State.
2. determine the ways University-industry partnerships contribute to decent employment in Rivers State.
3. ascertain the challenges to University-industry partnerships for achieving decent employment in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the factors influencing University-industry partnerships for decent employment in Rivers State?
2. What are the ways University-industry partnerships contribute to decent employment in Rivers State?
3. What are the challenges to University-industry partnerships for achieving decent employment in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of lecturers and employers on the factors influencing University-industry partnerships for decent employment in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of lecturers and employers on the ways University-industry partnerships contribute to decent employment in Rivers State.

3. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of lecturers and employers on the challenges to University-industry partnerships for achieving decent employment in Rivers State.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey design since emphasis was on investigating an ongoing phenomenon. The population of the study comprised all the 2,849 lecturers in the three public Universities in Rivers State as well as all the employers in the private sector in the State. The Taro Yamane formula was used to sample 351 lecturers while the Cochran formula for infinite population was used to draw 384 employers as sample for the study totaling 735 sampled respondents who were drawn using convenience sampling technique based on the respondents' availability. The instrument used for data gathering was a 15 item questionnaire tagged "University-Industry Partnerships for Decent Employment Questionnaire" (UIPDEQ) which was responded to on a four point modified Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA) =4, Agree (A) =3, Disagree (D) =2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) =1. The weights of these scores were aggregated and divided by 4 to arrive at 2.50 which is the criterion mean score for making decision. The questionnaire was face and content validated by three Measurement and Evaluation experts in the Department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, University of Port Harcourt. Cronbach alpha was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire and provided a coefficient of 0.84. The entire questionnaires were administered and recovered as a result of the sampling method used with the support of three research assistants. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while the hypotheses were tested using z-test at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Answer to Research Questions

Research Question One: What are the factors influencing University-industry partnerships for decent employment in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on the Factors Influencing University-Industry Partnerships for Decent Employment in Rivers State

S/No	Items	Lecturers n=351		Employers n=384		Mean Set	
		Mean $\bar{X}_1$	SD	Mean $\bar{X}_2$	SD	X $\bar{X}$	Decision
1	Legal guidelines can affect partnership between Universities and the industries	2.44	0.94	2.47	0.96	2.46	Low Extent
2	The level of innovativeness can determine the	2.75	0.81	2.88	0.81	2.82	High Extent

	existence of any collaboration						
3	Management system adopted by the entities is a determining factor	2.86	0.73	2.82	0.85	2.84	High Extent
4	Government policies can affect University-industry partnership	2.79	0.77	2.67	0.93	2.73	High Extent
5	The level of mutual reward that both entities will get can be an influencing factor	2.92	0.70	2.96	0.74	2.94	High Extent
	Average	**2.75**	**0.79**	**2.76**	**0.86**	**2.76**	**Agree**

Table 1 showed that the respondents disagree with item 1 that legal constraint was a factor influencing University industry partnerships and this was because the item had least mean set score of 2.46 and was below the criterion mean score of 2.50 used for decision making. However, they agree that issues around innovativeness, management system, government policies and mutual reward for the partnering agents were factors that influence their partnerships. However, the issue of mutual reward and management system ranked the highest with mean set values of 2.94 and 2.84 which means that the benefit that these agencies expect to get from each other as well as management system were the major factors that influence their partnerships. However, with the average mean set score of 2.76, it was shown that the respondents averagely agree with the items raised as the factors influencing University-industry partnerships for decent employment in Rivers State.

Research Question Two: What are the ways University-industry partnerships contribute to decent employment in Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on the Ways University-Industry Partnerships Contribute to Decent Employment in Rivers State

S/No	Items	Lecturers n=351		Employers n=384		Mean Set	
		Mean $\bar{X}_1$	SD	Mean $\bar{X}_2$	SD	X $\bar{X}$	Decision
6	Job mobility is made possible when Universities and industries collaborate	2.74	0.82	2.78	0.87	2.76	Agree

7	Opportunity is provided for more business startups to exist	2.80	0.76	2.83	0.84	2.82	Agree
8	Decent payment is guaranteed for workers	2.69	0.88	2.70	0.90	2.70	Agree
9	The level of creativity of workers is enhanced	2.82	0.77	2.85	0.82	2.84	Agree
10	Labour market equilibrium is established	2.80	0.76	2.75	0.88	2.78	Agree
	Average	**2.77**	**0.80**	**2.78**	**0.86**	**2.78**	**Agree**

Table 2 indicated that the respondents agree that partnership between the University and industries will improve job mobility, startup of businesses, decent wage, creativity and labour market equilibrium. This was because the items had mean values that were above the criterion mean score of 2.50 used for decision making. Item 9 had the highest mean set score of 2.84 indicating that partnership between these entities will promote creativity which is needed for decent employment. The average mean set score of 2.78 implied that the respondents averagely agree with the items listed as the ways University-industry partnerships contribute to decent employment in Rivers State.

Research Question Three: What are the challenges to University-industry partnerships for achieving decent employment in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation Scores on the Challenges to University-Industry Partnerships for Achieving Decent Employment in Rivers State

S/No	Items	Lecturers n=351		Employers n=384		Mean Set	
		Mean $\bar{X}_1$	SD	Mean $\bar{X}_2$	SD	$\bar{X}$	Decision
11	Flexibility of organizations involves if a bane	2.85	0.73	2.81	0.86	2.83	Agree
12	Inadequate funding in the institutions	2.94	0.69	2.96	0.74	2.95	Agree
13	Insufficient technology for meeting organizational goals and objectives	2.87	0.72	2.92	0.76	2.90	Agree
14	Insufficient backward linkage for the activities of the partnering entities	2.86	0.73	2.95	0.73	2.91	Agree

15	Hostile business environment where the entities reside	2.73	0.83	2.86	0.81	2.80	Agree
	Average	**2.85**	**0.74**	**2.90**	**0.78**	**2.88**	**Agree**

Table 3 was able to show that both the employers and lecturers agree with items 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 and this was because all of the items were above the criterion mean score of 2.50 used for making decision. However, item 12 with mean set score of 2.95 ranked top and this means that lack of funding was a major challenge to partnership between the Universities and industries and this was followed by the lack of backward linkage between these entities with mean set score of 2.91. In summary, the average mean set score of 2.88 suggested that the respondents basically agree with the items raised as the challenges to University-industry partnerships for achieving decent employment in Rivers State.

Test of Hypotheses

HO_1: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of lecturers and employers on the factors influencing University-industry partnerships for decent employment in Rivers State.

Table 4: z-test Analysis of no Significant Difference Between the Mean Ratings of Lecturers and Employers on the Factors Influencing University-Industry Partnerships for Decent Employment in Rivers State

Variable	n	Mean	SD	df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Level of Significance	Decision
Lecturers	351	2.75	0.79	733	0.16	1.96	0.05	Retain H_0
Employers	384	2.76	0.86					

Table 4 revealed that at 733 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, the table value of z-crit. of 1.96 was more than the estimated z-cal. value of 0.16 and for this reason, the null hypothesis was retained and this means that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of lecturers and employers on the factors influencing University-industry partnerships for decent employment in Rivers State.

HO_2: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of lecturers and employers on the ways University-industry partnerships contribute to decent employment in Rivers State.

Table 5: z-test Analysis of no Significant Difference Between the Mean Ratings of Lecturers and Employers on the Ways University-Industry Partnerships Contribute to Decent Employment in Rivers State

Variable	n	Mean	SD	df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Level of Significance	Decision
Lecturers	351	2.77	0.80					

				733	0.16	1.96	0.05	Retain H_0
Employers	384	2.78	0.86					

Table 5 indicated that at 733 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, the table value of z-crit. of 1.96 was more than the estimated z-cal. value of 0.16 and for this reason, the null hypothesis was retained and this implied that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of lecturers and employers on the ways University-industry partnerships contribute to decent employment in Rivers State.

HO_3: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of lecturers and employers on the challenges to University-industry partnerships for achieving decent employment in Rivers State.

Table 6: z-test Analysis of no Significant Difference Between the Mean Ratings of Lecturers and Employers on the Challenges to University-Industry Partnerships for Achieving Decent Employment in Rivers State

Variable	n	Mean	SD	df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Level of Significance	Decision
Lecturers	351	2.85	0.74	733	0.89	1.96	0.05	Retain H_0
Employers	384	2.90	0.78					

Table 6 suggested that at 733 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, the table value of z-crit. of 1.96 was more than the estimated z-cal. value of 0.89 and for this reason, the null hypothesis was retained and this indicated that there was no significant difference between the mean ratings of lecturers and employers on the challenges to University-industry partnerships for achieving decent employment in Rivers State.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the study was able to show that the lecturers and employers did not differ in their responses on the factors influencing University-industry partnerships for decent employment in Rivers State. It was shown that the respondents disagreed that legal provision is a factor that influences their ability to partner. This may be understandable because both the Universities and industries are legal entities backed up by law and operating under extant regulations and as such can legally deal with issues that may want to affect their ability to partner. Similarly, since there is no law that limit these institutions from collaborating, it can be said that legal issues may not be sufficient to affect the partnership between both entities except where the reason for partnership is on its own a legal issue. Shewakena and Belay (2017) pointed out that organizations can have ethical issues but this may not necessarily hinder collaboration with relevant institutions. However, the respondents pointed out that the issue of innovativeness can determine whether they will partner or not and this means that the industries expect the universities to be innovative and vice versa for any partnership to work between them. Similarly, the type of management system that exist in both entities was also identified as a factor that can influence their partnership. This means that the management of both

entities must be interested in and see the benefit of partnership before collaboration can exist. Issues of government polices as well as the benefit that both institutions will benefit from each other were also identified as influencing factors. Study by Ibeme (2020) alluded that the government can determine the number of intellectual property rights bought or sold in formal institutions and these are some of the ways that the government interfere with these partnerships.

It was revealed in the study that there are several ways in which partnership between the University and industries can contribute to decent employment. The respondents agree that employees through this partnership will find it easy to move from one job to another which provides a platform for workers to decide the kind of job that they want. The respondents also mentioned that through this collaboration, it also becomes easy for students to start businesses of their own as entrepreneurs. This makes the employee to be in charge of his or her own career path base on the platform that has been provided from this synergy. The issues of getting decent pay was also identified in the response of the respondents as one of the areas of benefit. This implies that the Universities will be able to provide the needed skills and the industries will be able to create the needed job which will make workers have access to good wage. The respondents also identified that the creativity of the employee can also be guaranteed and this can actually be seen from the internship programme that most students engage in even while in school. They also identified that this partnership will also lead to equilibrium in the labour market which is good for the employee, industry and Universities all at the same time. Czako et al., (2021) summarized by stating that this kind of partnership will improve research outputs which will greatly affect decent employment in the short and long term.

The lecturers and employers pointed out some challenges that hinder partnership between the University and the industries and this included the lack of flexibility to changes between these entities while the problem of lack of funding was identified as the major barrier. Similarly, insufficient technology both in the Universities and industries was identified as a challenge particularly in this technology age where everything is controlled by technology. Insufficient backward linkage which implies that the University should benefit from the industry and vice versa was also identified to be low which pose a challenge. This agree with the outcome of the study by Aloysius et al., (2018) which identified the issue of skill mismatch which can hinder University-industry partnerships. This means that the benefit between the entities is not complementary and equally rewarding and this may be a challenge. The hostile business environment where both entities operate was also identified as a constraint. Some of these challenges no doubt are beyond the control of the industries and Universities and this means that all hands must be on deck for these entities to partner and contribute to decent employment for present and future employees or employers of labour alike.

Conclusion

It was concluded based on the findings of the study that the lecturers and employer did not differ in their opinion on the factors influencing University-industry partnerships, how these partnerships contribute to decent employment and the challenges encountered. The study showed that if these challenges are addressed, University-industry partnerships can contribute to decent employment in several ways including business startup and job mobility.

Recommendations

The recommendations made from the findings of the study are as follows:

1. There is need for regular stakeholders' engagement between the University and captains of industry for the achievement of decent employment as this will provide both entities the opportunity to discuss areas of need and support for the achievement of collective goals and objectives.
2. The government and private sector need to invest heavily in the provision and adoption of relevant technologies that will simplify the collaboration of the University and industry as more innovative business and collaborative techniques can be applied by these entities for more efficient partnerships.
3. The government needs to create an enabling environment for Universities and industries to partner by limiting policies that interfere with the autonomy and management of these institutions in their effort to collaborate with relevant agencies that will contribute to the attainment of their goals and objectives.

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