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**CHALLENGES OF COOPERATIVE AND WORK- INTEGRATED EDUCATION IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup>  
CENTURY NIGERIA**

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## CHALLENGES OF COOPERATIVE AND WORK- INTEGRATED EDUCATION IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is associated with advancement in technology that has affected almost every facet of human endeavour. This has made it imperative for educational institutions to produce graduates that are globally competitive. Cooperative and work-integrated education is an out of school type of education designed to equip undergraduates with requisite practical skills, knowledge and abilities that will not only make them competitive but also help them to be employable. Cooperative and work-integrated education in Nigeria like in other countries is confronted with several challenges that are impeding the achievement of its objectives. This study is an attempt to identify challenges of cooperative and work-integrated education from the perspective undergraduates and employers of labour. The study employed the qualitative research method and the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of all 400 level undergraduate students who have undergone one form of work-integrated programme or the other and employers of labour in some selected organizations. 120 undergraduates and six employers of labour were selected for the study. Data were collected using a combination of researcher made questionnaire and Focused Group Discussion. Data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and simple percentages. The study revealed among other things that the duration of most of the work-integrated programmes is inadequate, and that the programme is confronted with several challenges despite its relevance in enhancing the employability. Based on the findings it was recommended that there should be adequate funding by the government.

### **Introduction**

The 21<sup>st</sup> Century is no doubt the most dynamic century in the history of humankind, with all the drastic and dramatic changes we have witnessed and are still experiencing in every facet of human existence, from technology to education, to work, play and our day-to-day activities. Today, the concepts: artificial intelligence and emotional intelligence are becoming commonplace. Many experts have predicted that the technological innovations of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will displace many existing jobs and cause many to lose their jobs except they develop or acquire some new skills and competencies to meet up with the changing times. This assertions agree with the(Committee for Economic Development of Australia, CEDA 2015) report cited in (Oliver, 2015), : *technology is going to dramatically reshape*

*our workforce in coming years and the nation's ability to rapidly adapt to technological change, and even more importantly, innovate, will be paramount for job creation and our future economic success (p.6). More specifically, the report predicts that almost five million jobs face a high probability of being replaced in the next decade or two while a further 18.4 per cent of the workforce has a medium probability of having their roles eliminated (p.6) because computers will reshape the labour market in two key ways: they will directly substitute for labour, disrupt the way work is conducted, expand competition and reduce the costs to consumers – but they will also reduce the income of workers; and jobs with low levels of social interaction, creativity, mobility and dexterity are particularly vulnerable (p.6).*

To meet up with the constant technological changes; there has been a lot of pressure on the educational system in Nigeria to produce graduates who can create jobs or at least be employable and be able to compete favourably with their contemporaries around the world. There is a need for acquisition, update, and upgrade of skills, knowledge, attitudes, and abilities not just to be employable, but also to be relevant in an ever-changing world. Cooperative and Work Integrated Education is an out of school type of education which exposes undergraduates to practical, relevant and real work experience that enables them to acquire skills, knowledge, attitude and abilities required to enter the work force. It is intended to bridge the gap and eliminate the disconnect between knowledge, skills, attitude, and ability possessed by graduates from higher institutions and employers' expectations as well as help the fresh graduate or worker achieve or maintain relevance in the scheme of things, especially work in our dynamic world. Cooperative and Work Integrated Education as their names imply, refers to a synergy between formal education (classroom based cognitive learning) and practical work experience( work place based experiential learning) or work skills, norms and knowledge acquisition. Participants in cooperative and work-integrated education can study and practice what they have learnt alternately. Not only does this enhance their employability, but (Dressler & Keeling, 2011) in( Karsten& Richard, 2011) asserts that Work integrated education programmes also allow for the development of greater awareness of career paths. They also agree that for some students, work placements provide clarity about skills and qualifications needed to become competent in the students' chosen career subsequently providing motivation to complete graduate studies thereby enabling the students to become enculturated into a community of practice or experts.

Cooperative and work integrated education programmes provide students with the opportunity to gain relevant work experience in their career fields. This can give students an edge over their peers who did not have such opportunities. Many scholars agree that Cooperative Education is making it easy for students to make the school-to-work transition. The combination of academic study and work produces an overall learning experience that gives greater meaning to students' studies and more direction to career development. Since experiential Learning is the process of learning by doing, by engaging students in hands-on experiences they are better able to link theories and knowledge learned in the classroom to real-world situations. As an integral part of the overall educational experience, the cooperative and work integrated learning programmes allow students to take on increasing levels of responsibility and to use their job knowledge and classroom learning to make meaningful contributions to the organizations in which they work. Many graduates are hired by the same organisations where they trained. Cooperative and work integrated education is a unique component of education that benefits the students by helping them to meet the demands of the job market thereby reducing unemployment and underemployment in the country. This is achieved by helping higher education institutions to embed relevant real work learning into the curriculum of higher education to produce graduates that are ready to enter the workforce with requisite skills.

Despite these plethora of contributions of cooperative and work- integrated education and the vital role it plays in enhancing employment opportunities for graduates, WIL is confronted with a number of challenges which include the fact that work integrated education focuses more attention on outcomes rather than on what is learnt how it is learnt and from where or whom the knowledge is coming from (Coll et al 2009; Hu, abadeer and Husman, 2009). Others according to Jackson (2015) are most host organisations do not provide adequate access to supervisors, learning support, **inclusion**, and preparation processes.

- Lack of clear expectation of graduates
- Lack of alignment of learning objectives with appropriate learning support.
- Lack of effective evaluation mechanism to access achievement of target outcomes.
- Inadequate effort to link and integrate campus and workplace learning thereby making achievement of work-integrated programme difficult.

There is also the challenge of ineffective monitoring and evaluation of the achievement of the programme. Jackson 2015 argues that assessment of work should clearly define the precise nature of the skill, or behaviours and the

expected level of performance for undergraduates at different levels of their programmes. Jackel, et al (2011) advocates that assessment of WIL learning outcomes should be done using methods that encourage self-reflection and feedback such as peer assessment, portfolio reviews, self-assessments and checklists. In addition, formative methods of evaluation such as blogs, e-journals, diaries, commentaries, and emails.

## **Statement of the Problem**

In Nigeria, The National Bureau of Statistics' reports of December 2018, puts unemployment rate at 23.1%. Most scholars agree that the problem of unemployment and underemployment is largely because of the mismatch and disconnect between the knowledge and skills obtained from these institutions, and expectations of the workforce. In addition, many youths do not have the right attitude, motivation, and drive to fit into the labour market. Although higher institutions try to incorporate some form of work- integrated learning like Industrial Training (I T), Teaching Practice(T P), Internship, Practicum, Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) and others into their curriculum to acquaint them with practical work experience, work place culture and professional behaviours expected of people in their respective professions that will enhance their potentials for securing a job, most of the graduates fail to secure appropriate job because they tend to be ill equipped for the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century labour force. Scholars have given several reasons for the high rate of graduate unemployment in Nigeria despite all the efforts by higher education institutions. Some blame the situation to duration of the work-integrated programme which they argue is short for any meaningful learning, some blame it on the lack of synergy between higher institutions and the organizations that offer students opportunity for work integrated learning in designing the curriculum for the programme, yet some believe that most of the organizations do not give students opportunity to have hands on training because they want to keep some things under wraps because to the attitude of some students. The important and vital role of work integrated education in ensuring that graduates from higher education institutions are work ready and prepared for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> has therefore made it pertinent to identify and deal with the challenges impeding the role of work integrated education in enhancing graduate employability. The study is therefore an attempt to identify the challenges of cooperative and work integrated education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria from the perspective of undergraduates and employers of labour.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The study examined the relevance and challenges of Cooperative and Work- Integrated Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the relevance of Cooperative and Work- Integrated Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria?
2. What are the challenges of Cooperative and Work- Integrated Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Nigeria?

## **Methodology**

The study employed qualitative research method using descriptive survey design. The population of the study consisted of undergraduate students in 400 level who have undergone one form of compulsory work-integrated programme or the other during their studies. The university makes it mandatory for all the students to undergo at least one form of cooperative and work-integrated education or the other. This could be Industrial Training, SIWES, Teaching Practice, Practicum, depending on the students' programme. In addition, employers of labour, especially those who recruit for other organizations were interviewed. 120 undergraduates were selected from all the departments that participate in work integrated programmes. Data on the relevance and challenges of cooperative and work-integrated education was collected using a combination of Focused Group Discussion (FGD) with selected employers of labour and a researcher made questionnaire. The instrument was first validated by giving it to experts in test and measurement in the faculty of Education. Analysis of the FGD was done using thematic analysis where common themes were identified and analyzed. Percentage was used to analyse the data gathered.

## Result

### Cooperative and Work Integrated Programmes

Programmes	No	%
Industrial Training	32	26.67
Teaching Practice	46	33.33
Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES)	20	16.67
Practicum	30	25

Information from the table above shows that the respondents in this study have participated in several programmes which include Teaching practice, 33.33 percent, Industrial Training 26.67 percent. Others are Practicum, 25 percent.

**Table 2: No. of Times Participated in Work Integrated Programmes**

No of Times participated in work integrated programme	No	%
Once	110	91.67
More than once	10	8.33
Total	120	100

It could be observed from table 2 that almost all the respondent's 91.67 percent indicated that they only participated once.

**Table 3: Duration of Work- Integrated Programme Participated**

Duration of Programme	No	%
Less than three Months	14	11.67
Three Months	94	78.33
More than three Months	12	10
Total	120	100

Evidence from table 3 shows that majority of the respondents 78.33% indicated the work-integrated programme the participated in was for only three months while only 10% indicated more than three months.

**Table 4: Opinion of the respondents on the adequacy of the duration of work-integrated programmes**

Adequacy or not of Programmes	No	%
Adequate	40	33.33
Inadequate	80	66.67
Total	120	100

Information from table 4 shows that 80 (66.67%) of the respondents indicated that the duration of the programmes is not adequate while only 40(33.33%) believe the duration is adequate.

**Table 5: Relevance of Work- integrated Education**

Statements	Yes	%	No	%
The programme impacted my career aspirations	85	70.83	35	29.17
The programme will enhance my opportunity of getting a good job in the future	112	93.33	8	6.67
The programmes exposed me to skills and abilities required by employers of labour.	108	90	30	10
Access to experts in field during work-integrated programme has not enhanced my development of skills for work placement	25	20.83	95	79.67
I gained more confidence through the work integrated Programme	82	68.33	38	31.67
The practical experience acquired during work-integrated learning cannot influence my choice of career and profession	50	41.67	70	58.33

As shown in table 5, the respondents overwhelmingly agreed that work- integrated education is relevant to them in future job aspirations, career and professional choice, gaining confidence and in acquiring requisite skills, abilities that foster employability. In particular, the table shows that 108(90%) of the respondents stated that work- integrated programmes exposed them to skills and abilities required by employers of labour. Similarly,112(93.33%) of the respondents agreed thatwork-integrated programmes will enhance their opportunity of securing a good job in future.

**Table 6: Challenges of Work- Integrated Education.**

Challenges	Ranks
Poor and ineffective coordination between organizations and institutions of higher learning.	1 <sup>st</sup>
Duration of the programme is too short for any meaningful impact	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Poor funding	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Ineffective supervision and monitoring of participants by both higher institutions and organizations.	4 <sup>th</sup>
Experts in the field are not always available for meaning interactions	5 <sup>th</sup>
Rejection of IT students by organization and industries	6 <sup>th</sup>
Lack of partnership and linkage between industries and higher institutions in	7 <sup>th</sup>
Designing the curriculum of work-integrated programme	
Unwillingness of some organizations to accept students for work-integrated programmes	8 <sup>th</sup>

Evidence from table 6 shows that poor and ineffective coordination of programme by both higher institutions and organizations was ranked first by the respondents while unwillingness by some organizations was ranked last. In addition, the researchers held a Focused Group Discussion with six employers of labour. The discussions mainly sought their opinion on the relevance and challenges of work-integrated education in Nigeria. The following themes emerged from the discussion with employers of labour. Work integrated education programmes are relevant for employability and prepares participants for their future careers. Participants acquire hard and soft skills that give them an edge over their contemporaries who did not participate in WIL programmes. Some employers go as far as finding out where students have worked before to determine if they are suitable for their organisations. Meaning that participating in a WIL programme can suffice as relevant work experience. One of the discussants noted that in his organisation, they take note of students who were exceptional during the Industrial Training and such students are given preference when they latter come back to apply for job placement or for National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), thus the training they have received also benefits the organisation. With regards to challenges, the discussants agree that the duration of the programmes are inadequate, because most times it is just for 3months and the first month is usually for induction; to familiarise and train students on work culture.

They also agree that the frequency is also inadequate; most programmes are done just once during the duration of the students' academic programme. One of the discussants noted that floor space is also a major challenge to the WIL programme; many organisations do not have enough space to accommodate additional staff, thus they do not accept students for WIL programmes.

Another discussant noted that funding is also a major determinant for employers to accept students for WIL programme, since many organisations already have a budget for these programmes which the cannot exceed, and they do not want to encumber themselves unnecessarily considering the fact that participants are supposed to be paid or at least given a stipend. The discussants agree that some students have a nonchalant attitude to work, and the programme generally; they participate just to earn unit points required for graduation. In addition, some get into the programme with their minds set on making money rather than on acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary for employability. Some organisations do not accept students who want to do a 3months programme because they feel the duration is too short to benefit them meaningfully. Lack of adequate corroboration between the supervisor in school and the organisations, as a result, there is no coordinated process of evaluation.

## Discussion of findings

The study has revealed the critical role of cooperative and work-integrated education in helping higher education graduate acquire requisite practical skill for employability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Cooperative and work-integrated education provides opportunity for students to develop practical skills outside the formal school environment. The finding of the study revealed that the main types of cooperative education prevalent in Nigeria are Teaching Practice, Industrial training and SIWES and a few others. The study further revealed that most of these Work-integrated



education programmes do not last for more than three months, and students only participate once during their four year programme. This finding is expected because most work-integrated programmes of higher institutions in Nigeria are design to be fragment part of curriculum for a semester. The duration is usually too short for any meaningful impact. Despite the short duration of work-integrated programme, participants overwhelmingly agreed that they relevant to them in a number of ways which include helping them to develop practical experience that enhance their employability in the future, help them gain more confidence as well as gain knowledge, skills and abilities to be more competitive in the job market. Notwithstanding its importance, cooperative and work-integrated education in Nigeria is grappling with numerous challenges as revealed by this study. For instance, there a lot of issues that minimise the effectiveness of these programmes; students do not have enough time to engage in these trainings because they must go back to school to continue with their bookwork. The schools are also not fully involved in these trainings, except for evaluation which in most cases is just to ensure that the students were present at their respective places of postings and that their documents were duly signed by their supervisors or employers. Most organisations also do not give students the opportunity to have hands on trainings because they want to keep some things under wraps and because of the attitude of some students. Another issue of concern is the fact that many students are not offered the course of their choice by the higher institutions thus, they end up not being passionate about it, and they also carry this attitude over to their place of training and are unable to maximise the opportunity to learn new skills. These assertions are consistent with Abubakar,2012 who contend that students on IT are always confronted with a barrage of problems which can be institutional or personal.

## Conclusions

The importance of cooperative and work-integrated education in promoting opportunities for employment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be over emphasised. However, the study has revealed the ability of work- integrated education to effectively equip graduated for the 21<sup>st</sup> labour force is impeded by a barrage of challenges.it therefore pertinent that if the laudable goals of work-integrated education are to be achieved concerted efforts should be to eliminate any form of impediment.

## Recommendations

The study recommended that there is the need to increase the duration of the programme in Nigeria, experts in organizations outside the institution should be involved in the design of work-integrated programmes. Adequate funding should be earmarked for the programme by the government as incentive for them to accept students on internship with ease. Finally, there should be pre- briefing of students from their school to go after knowledge and experience in some specific areas because sometimes, some students forget that they are there to learn and get carried away and there should be proper evaluation to assess increase in knowledge and acquisition of necessary skills for employability.

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