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21st Century Work Environment and Contemporary Employability Skills among Millennia University Graduates

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Abstract

Employability skills have transformed from the acquisition of university degrees to possessions of cognate skills other than only degrees that can help employees secure employment in contemporary work environments. This study evaluates essential skills that will prepare millennia of youths and graduates for employment in the present job market. The study investigated four major hypotheses to underscore the employability opportunities of graduates in challenging 21st-century work environments. The study utilized a cross-sectional research design to survey 310 millennial graduates and 110 recruitment managers and employers of labour in Lagos State on a probability random sampling basis. The study employed a multivariate, multiple-regression analysis to evaluate the postulated hypotheses. The study has established that emerging technologies, and technical, and professional skills are significant to the employability opportunities of millennia graduates in Nigeria. It demonstrated that cross-cultural competence, effective communication, and collaborative skills are predictors of employability opportunities for millennia graduates in Nigeria. The study has investigated that self-adaptive, intrapreneurial and entrepreneurial skills elevated the employability opportunities of millennia of graduates in Nigeria. It also established that emotional intelligence, teamwork, conflict resolution, and leadership skills enhanced the employability opportunities of millennial graduates in Nigeria. The study concluded that university degrees alone are not a golden ticket that guarantees employment for Nigerian graduates but emerging and soft skills do the wonders.

Key Words: *Work Environment, Employability Skills, Millennia Graduates, Cross-cultural competence, emotional intelligence, Self-adaptive, Conflict resolution*

Introduction

Graduate employability has become an issue of concern to both human capital specialists and management consultants. The challenge of graduate employability remains a serious concern for tertiary education policymakers across the globe. This concern has been given renewed focus as a result of the gap that exists between the job skills possessed by graduates and the skills needed in the workplace. In the 21st-century workplace, academic qualifications and degree classes are no longer enough for graduates to meet the needs of job markets. Employers now expect employees to possess an additional set of skills (Habu & Oni, 2024). The 21st century has significantly changed the way of work and the workplace environment. Advancements in technology, socioeconomics, and industry have greatly affected organizations. These changes are anticipated to further intensify in the future, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. To adapt to this rapidly evolving landscape,

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organizations must have employees who are dedicated to excelling in technical and professional skills, embracing emerging technologies, demonstrating self-motivation, and actively engaging in their work. The 21st-century work environment is characterized by rapid technological change, globalization, and an ever-increasing pace of innovation (Succi & Canovic, 2019). This has led to a demand for new and evolving skill sets among graduates entering the workforce.

The contemporary work environment is characterized by rapid technological advancements, globalization, and constant change. These factors have brought about new challenges and demands for contemporary employability skills among university graduates, including those from Millenia University. Following the suggestions of Iqbal, Shaikh, Jamal, Akhtar, Rahim, and Kousar, (2023), the following modern skills are required for the employability of graduates and are considered key challenges and the associated employability skills needed. Technological disruption which is the rapid pace of technological innovation has disrupted traditional job roles and created a need for continuous learning and adaptation. Digital literacy, technological proficiency, adaptability, and a growth mindset are essential employability skills for graduates to navigate the ever-changing technological landscape (Chitra, 2021). Joynes, Rossignoli, & Amonoo-Kuofi, (2019) argued that global competition is a key factor for employability in the 21st century. The globalized economy has intensified competition for jobs, requiring graduates to possess a competitive edge and the ability to work in diverse and multicultural environments. Cross-cultural competence, communication skills, language proficiency, and the ability to collaborate effectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds and employability skills can sustain a 21st-century work environment (Bridgstock, 2017).

In the recent study of Trask (2024), it was established that the changing job landscape deals with the versatility of graduates to fit in any situation. The nature of work is evolving, with an increasing demand for project-based and freelance work, as well as the need for entrepreneurial and self-employment skills. Therefore, employability skills such as intrapreneurial and entrepreneurial mindset, adaptability, problem-solving skills, self-management, and the ability to embrace uncertainty and ambiguity are essential elements that are requisite for sustaining the contemporary 21st-century work environment. In the same vein, Hicks (2024) claimed that complex problem-solving skills are significant elements that can assist in securing jobs and be relevant in the present work environment. Challenges are complexities of modern-day challenges that require graduates to possess critical thinking, analytical, and problem-solving abilities to navigate and address intricate issues. Its

corresponding skills of employability involve critical thinking, analytical reasoning, creativity, innovation, and the ability to synthesize information from diverse sources (Adeleke, & Ojewale, 2024). Another employability skill needed in the 21st century is soft skills demand. Employers increasingly value soft skills, such as communication, teamwork, leadership, and emotional intelligence, as they are essential for effective collaboration and successful organizational functioning. Its attendant employability Skills are strong communication abilities, interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, teamwork, leadership, and conflict resolution skills (Whorton, Casillas, Oswald, & Shaw, 2017).

To address these challenges, Millenia University graduates need to cultivate a broad range of contemporary employability skills alongside their academic qualifications. This can be achieved through a combination of curricular and co-curricular activities, internships, project-based learning, and exposure to real-world scenarios. By equipping graduates with these employability skills, Millenia University can better prepare them for the dynamic and ever-evolving 21st-century work environment. This is what birthed this study for youths and graduates to be more proactive.

The following are the objectives of this study:

- (a) To demonstrate how emerging technologies and technical and professional skills will enhance the employability chance of millennia graduates in Nigeria.
- (b) To evaluate if cross-cultural competence, effective communication, and collaborative skills will improve employability opportunities of millennia graduates in Nigeria
- (c) To analyze how self-adaptive, intrapreneurial and entrepreneurial skills will elevate employability opportunities of millennia graduates in Nigeria.
- (d) To investigate how emotional intelligence, teamwork, conflict resolution, and leadership skills will enhance the employability opportunities of millennia graduates in Nigeria.

To accomplish these objectives, the following conjectural hypotheses are critical to graduates employability:

- H₀₁: Emerging technologies, and technical, and professional skills are not significant to employability opportunities of millennia graduates in Nigeria.
- H₀₂: Cross-cultural competence, effective communication, and collaborative skills are insignificant to employability opportunities of millennia graduates in Nigeria.

H₀₃: Self-adaptive, intrapreneurial and entrepreneurial skills will elevate employability opportunities of millennial graduates in Nigeria.

H₀₄: Emotional intelligence, teamwork, conflict resolution, and leadership skills do enhance employability opportunities of millennial graduates in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

Human Capital Theory (HCT)

This study utilizes Human Capital Theory (HCT) as a framework to examine how well graduates are prepared for employability, as HCT is one of the most commonly employed theories in addressing employability issues. The concept of human capital refers to the investment made in higher education and work placement programs aimed at developing a graduate's capabilities, which in turn enhances their potential income (Slaughter, Taylor, & Rosinger, 2015). According to Becker (2009), human capital terminology encompasses the collective knowledge, habits, and social and personality traits, including creativity, embodied in an individual's ability to perform labour and generate economic value. Since the 1960s, human capital theory has been widely utilized to study the association and connection between higher education (HE) and careers, pioneered by Mincer and Schultz (1962) and further developed by Becker in 1964. In supporting HCT, Schultz (1961) argues that the future social and economic development and growth of any country are reliant on the skills and knowledge acquired through education and work placements, reflecting the expectations placed on its human capital (Bouchard, 1998). Additionally, Kirk, Miller, & Miller (1986) stated that human capital theory aims to examine the financial benefits derived from investments in people's skills and resources. Such investments will result in highly-skilled labourers being placed in highly-skilled careers, potentially improving the nation's economy and prosperity (McMahon, 2009; Slaughter et al., 2015). HCT posits that Human Resources professionals can evaluate the employment readiness of job seekers. However, the lack of graduates' characteristics, the ambiguity surrounding the quality of education attained, and the shortage of future career opportunities make the process of assessing employability highly challenging (Levhari & Weiss, 1974).

Taking into consideration Nigeria's peculiar situation, according to Gabriel (2024), the HCT theory is used to describe the following expectations: the attainment of graduates' readiness for employability skills is the responsibility of formal education, educated graduates must have higher priority for

employment, and finally, higher income payments depend on the optimum productivity and performance of graduates. To strengthen the validity of the Human Capital theory in the direct relationship between education and its primary role in providing skilled graduates, Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964) argued that, at the initial stage of employment, investment in education and training is recognized as providing pre-eminent levels of benefits for both graduates and industries. They explain that employees can easily gain the required workplace skills and knowledge. This claim is also supported by Melink & Pavlin (2012), who stressed that industries can ensure high productivity as a result of employees' performance when they are effectively educated and trained.

Education and Economic Development Theory

The idea of nurturing education and economic growth can be credited to Smith (1776) who initially established the significant abilities of everyone in the society which is now described as human capital. This is an essential feature among four fixed capital components influencing productive behaviour in the country (Medama, 2006). Coma and Douglas (1928) argued that economic development in advanced nations is driven by expansion in physical capital and the preparedness of skills and educated manpower. This theory was further advanced by Schultz (1961), who claimed his core theory of education and economic advancement. A country's capability to engage its physical capital in a productive manner is susceptible to the quality of its human capital. Schultz (1961) further added that if human resources appreciate in value in the same proportion as its physical capital, this would speak great volumes about the impact of economic development. Furthermore, Breton (2012) expatiated Schultz's theory, proposing that education contributes a large spectrum and significant role in the nation's economic building process. He later identified a direct connection between human capital and physical capital, implying that education influences national economic growth directly and otherwise. On a final note, the research by Kamaruzaman, Hamid, Mutalib, and Rasul (2019) supported the theory of education and economic development as a crucial and significant framework tackling the balance between education and employment, and its application when looking at the concept of employability. This has to do with directly honing the mastering of new skills for graduates' employability via education, novel training and the development of the fourth industrial revolution.

Empirical Review

Higher institutions of learning across the world are adapting their teaching approaches and utilizing technology to better improve students' needs and ensure they are well-prepared for future roles and

employability in industry and society. Instructors are under increasing pressure to move away from traditional lecturing methods and create more interactive and collaborative learning environments, incorporating technology where appropriate. This shift highlights the need for a deeper understanding of the personal and contextual factors that influence students' learning in the classroom setting (Mazzocchi et al., 2024). Universities essentially set the tone and pace for the classroom, establishing patterns and models that shape students' attitudes toward learning, both individually and as a group. Consequently, it is crucial to identify the role of lecturers' leadership behaviours and how they impact student learning. Specifically, within the education sector, our knowledge of transforming students into future-ready and creative individuals remains limited. Identifying the factors that amplify or hinder students' creative behaviours is essential for fostering classroom environments conducive to developing the new skills necessary for students to thrive in their future careers (Raub, Cruz, Gorka, Hodari, Hodari, & Saul, 2024).

After completing their studies, university graduates face higher expectations from employers to be work-ready and increased competition for jobs from older, potentially more qualified candidates. Once employed, a growing number of employers have shifted their expectations of what they most desire from their employees. Today's labour market places a much greater emphasis on workers' ability to effectively apply their knowledge and skills in new situations (Mainga, Murphy-Braynen, Moxey, & Quddus, 2022). Collectively, no previous generation has entered the workforce with more years of education, higher levels of qualifications, or more significant human capital, yet mounting evidence shows them struggling to secure employment opportunities. However, the 21st century is characterized by a wave of uncertainty that has considerably altered the global perception of work, employment, careers, and education. The notion of work is shifting from a lifelong career to a constantly changing one. The aim of education is shifting from focusing on students' employment to their employability (Subramony, Rosenbaum, 2024). Assessment is moving away from testing students' acquisition of knowledge, skills, and dispositions to evaluating their readiness for the workforce (Diaa, Abidin, & Roller, 2024). As the global shift toward Employability Skills (ES) intensifies, it's time for Nigeria to pay due attention to how these skills are developed and assessed in schools worldwide (Ojuolape & Mohd, 2024). This is crucial for a country that prioritizes education as a means to transition from an agrarian to a modern and prosperous economy (Ardi, Cahyadi, Meilani, & Pramono, 2024).

Empirical evidence shows that to be employable in today's labour and employment market, university graduates must possess the ability to work independently, be self-motivated and self-monitoring, engage in continuous learning, adapt to 21st-century work environments, communicate through various channels, interact effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds, and work remotely in virtual teams (Argueta-Rivera, Chen, Jean-Baptiste, Siner, & Hebl, 2024). This set of cognitive and affective capabilities is categorized as personal, core, and process skills, as well as foundational, personal, interpersonal, creative, problem-solving skills, and personal qualities and attitudes (Shaibu, & Ebenezer-Nwokeji, 2024). These skills are critical for accomplishing an optimal degree of competence, building a high level of confidence, and capacity for task completion effectively (Ogunmakin, 2024). Collectively, these are largely described as skills in preparation for employability opportunities, recognised as cogent means to fulfilling the problems of the present work environment. However, several of researches persistently revealed that millennia of graduates and employees continuously lack the required skills that will enable them for employment which are needed for the 21st century work environment. Unfortunately, these are the very skills and competencies that Nigerian graduates seem to be lacking today.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted descriptive research with a cross-sectional design to survey the executives, employers, human resources and millennial graduates. The choice of using this design is that it fosters the collection of data from a large pool of population and respondents at once (Hunziker & Blankenagel, 2024). This research design is used to underscore what happening at the present moment among Nigerian graduates' employability opportunities. It is often utilized to establish the prevailing characteristics in the population at a certain point in time.

Population and Sample Size

The study population consists of millennial graduates in Nigeria, the human capital executives of organizations, and the employers of labour in Lagos State, Nigeria. The population is considered infinite as millennia of graduates are spread all over the state, thus obtaining a certain figure for this population is a daunting effort. Also, the study is not privy to a definite population of human capital, resources managers, executives of organization and employers of labour of surveyed organizations in Lagos State. Therefore, the study used scientific means of sample size determination of infinite

population by Cochran (1977). Since the study deals with an infinite population, the sample size is determined using Cochran's (1977) formula for an infinite population. The formula is:

$$n_o = \frac{Z^2 * P * q}{e^2}$$

Where n_o = Sample Size

Where: n_o = Sample Size Z = Z-value (e.g., 2.58 for 99% level of confidence)

P = % of taking a population preference, denoted in decimal

$q = 1 - P$

e = Sampling error level of acceptance/precision (expressed as a decimal, e.g., 0.05)

Thus, the sample size taken for the study is derived from the use of the above formula for widely spread millennial graduates, employers of labour, and human resources managers in Lagos State, Nigeria. Assuming maximum variability, which is equal to 50% ($p = 0.5$), the sample size is as follows:

$$p = 0.5, \text{ hence } q = 1 - 0.5 = 0.5 \quad e = 0.04 \quad z = 2.58$$

Thus, the sample size is calculated as:

$$n_o = \frac{(2.58)^2 (0.5) (0.5)}{0.05^2} = 1.6641/0.0025 = 665$$

The total sample size for the study is 600 millennial graduates, employers of labour, and human resources managers in Lagos State. However, the study took the liberty to survey 450 millennial graduates and 150 employers of labour, human resource managers in reputable organizations in Lagos

Sampling Technique

A probability random sampling technique was employed in administering the research instrument to the participants, which included millennial graduates, employers of labour, and human resource managers in Lagos State. The decision to use a probability sampling technique ensures that all characteristics of the population are fully represented in the study. Additionally, it helps to accommodate all elements within the study population. Furthermore, the outcome of the probability sampling strategy has been proven to possess high external validity and generalizability potential (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Data Analysis Technique

The data analysis strategy utilized for this study is multivariate analysis. This was employed to establish a relationship that occurs between independent variables of the contemporary 21st-century work

environment and employability opportunities. The multivariate analysis is conducted using a simple linear regression model. This data analysis strategy is chosen because it enables the measurement of the strength and direction of the relationship that exists between two or more elements. Furthermore, it helps to indicate whether this association is valid or not (Reinsel, Velu, & Chen, 2022). The choice of multivariate analysis and the simple linear regression model allows for an examination of the potential relationships between multiple variables in the study.

Data Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Millennial Graduates, Employers of Labour, Human Resource Managers Personnel Demographic Characteristics

Profile	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Profile	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>			<i>Gender</i>		
Male	160	51.6	Male	60	54.5
Female	150	48.4	Female	50	45.5
<i>Education</i>			<i>Education</i>		
Bachelors	210	67.7	Bachelors	40	36.4
Masters	55	17.7	Masters	40	36.4
Professionals	45	14.6	Professionals	30	27.2
<i>Age</i>			<i>Age</i>		
22 – 25 years	100	32.2	25 – 30	25	22.7
25 – 30 years	75	24.3	30 – 35	30	27.2
30 – 35 years	80	25.8	35 – 40	28	25.5
35 – 40 years	55	17.7	40 years above 27		24.5
<i>Skill Competence</i>			<i>Corporate Status</i>		
Skilled	125	40.3	Employer of Labour	20	18.2
Competent	110	35.5	Human Resource (HRM)	60	54.5
expertise	45	14.5	Recruiter	30	27.3
Professional	30	9.7			
<i>Professional Length of Service</i>			<i>Corporate Experience</i>		
0 - 5 years	250	80.6	1 – 5 years	20	18.1
5 – 10 years	60	19.4	5 – 10 years	30	27.3
			10 –15 years	30	27.3
			15 years above	30	27.3

Source: Field Survey, 2024 NB: n = 310 (Millennia Graduates); n =110 (Employers of Labour and HRM)

Out of 450 graduates surveyed, 310 were considered useful for this study, while 110 executives, employer of labour and human resources managers, as well as recruiters, were considered worthy out of 150 participants that the study administered the questionnaire as indicated in Table 1

Analysis of Data and Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1 - Ho: Emerging technologies, and technical, and professional skills are not significant to employability opportunities of millennial graduates in Nigeria.

Table 2: Data Analysis Consideration for Hypothesis One

Variable	B	Beta	T-value	Sig.	R	R ²	F-Value	P-Value
Emerging Technologies	.542	.555	10.415	.001	.555	.455	105.25	.002
Technical Skill	.650	.519	11.235	.000				
Professional Skill	.549	.345	9.456	.000				

Source: Field Survey: 2024; Dependent Variable: Employability Opportunity (P < 0.05)

Table 2. Illustrates a multiple regression analysis, showing R, which indicates the collective relationship between three dimensions of work environment challenges and skills needed for employability in a contemporary work environment. It shows that R = 0.555, 55% association exist from these multiple regressions, while R-square (R²) = 0.455 shows that 45.5% variation occurred in employability opportunities of graduates is explained and determined by the multiple predictors of emerging technologies, technical and professional skills. Also beta coefficient has an individual level of determination, emerging technologies at 54.2% strength of relationship, technical skill has 65%; professional skill has 54.9%; and relationship with employability opportunities. This shows the mixed level of relationship by looking at it individually, and they showed that there exists a significant association with the dependent variable of employability opportunities. As the significance value is less than 0.05 at (P = 0.002), it, therefore, means that the variables are highly significant and show a good predictor of employability opportunities. Thus, the study concludes that emerging technologies, and technical, and professional skills are significant to the employability opportunities of millennial graduates in Nigeria.

Hypothesis 2 - Ho: Cross-cultural competence, effective communication, and collaborative skills are insignificant to employability opportunities of millennial graduates in Nigeria

Table 3: Data Analysis Consideration for Hypothesis Two

Variable	B	Beta	T-Value	Sig.	R	R ²	F-Value	P-Value
Cross-cultural Competence	.410	.405	12.148	.001	.405	.515	40.219	.000
Effective Communication	.600	.350	15.756	.000				
Collaborative Skills	.235	.325	9.26	.000				

Source: Field Survey: 2024; Dependent Variable: Employability Opportunity (P < 0.05)

Table 3 shows the interaction and association of multiple variables of cross-cultural competence, effective communication, and collaboration skills on graduate employability opportunities. It signifies R, which implies multiple associations of cross-cultural competence, effective communication, and collaborative skills on graduate employability opportunities at 40.5% in a contemporary work environment. It further shows R-square (R²) = 0.515 shows that 51.5% variation occurred in employability opportunities of graduates is explained and determined by the multiple predictors of cultural competence, effective communication, and collaborative skills. Also beta coefficient has an individual level of determination, cross-cultural competence at 40% strength of relationship, effective communication skill has 35%; collaborative skill has 32.5%; and relationship with employability opportunities. This shows the combined degree of relationship taking it individually, and they indicated a significant association with the dependent variable of employability opportunities. As the significance value is less than 0.05 at (P = 0.000), it, therefore, means that the variables are highly significant and show a good predictor of employability opportunities. Thus, the study concludes that cross-cultural competence, effective communication, and collaborative skills are significant to employability opportunities of millennial graduates in Nigeria

Hypothesis 3 - Ho: Self-adaptive, intrapreneurial and entrepreneurial skills will elevate the employability opportunities of millennial graduates in Nigeria.

Table 4: Data Analysis Consideration for Hypothesis Three

Variable	B	Beta	T-value	Sig.	R	R ²	F-Value	P-Value
Self-Adaptive Skill	.565	.747	10.055	.002	.747	.515	65.219	.001
Intrapreneurial Skill	.480	.502	8.567	.000				
Entrepreneurial Skill	.367	.450	7.590	.000				

Source: Field Survey: 2024; Dependent Variable: Employability Opportunity (P < 0.05)

Table 4 indicates R as a multiple correlation coefficient and is a measure of the quality of the prediction of graduate employability opportunities. A value of 74.4% combined correlation between self-adaptive skills, intrapreneurial and entrepreneurial skills, and graduates' employability opportunities. R-square (R²) = 51.5% coefficient of determination, which illustrates the proportion of variance that occurred on employability opportunities as explained by self-adaptive skills, intrapreneurial and entrepreneurial skills. This shows a good determination of this result. Also, the model shows a statistical significance of each of the prerequisite skills needed in 21st work environment variables. This tests whether the beta coefficients are equal to zero in the population. P-value is less than 0, this means that coefficients are statistically significant. The beta coefficients have an individual degree of determination, self-adaptive at 74.7%, intrapreneurial at 50.2%, entrepreneurial skills at 45%, and relationship with employability opportunities. As the significance value is less than 0.05 at (P = 0.00). Thus, the variables are significant and show good predictors of employability opportunities. Hence, this study concluded that self-adaptive, intrapreneurial and entrepreneurial skills will elevate the employability opportunities of millennial graduates in Nigeria

Hypothesis 4 - Ho: Emotional intelligence, teamwork, conflict resolution, and leadership skills do enhance employability opportunities of millennial graduates in Nigeria.

Table 5: Data Analysis Consideration for Hypothesis Three

Variable	B	Beta	T-value	Sig.	R	R ²	F-Value	P-Value
Emotional Intelligence	.342	.655	5.155	.003	.655	.510	35.219	.000
Team-Work	.415	.475	9.215	.000				
Conflict Resolution Skill	.333	.235	10.126	.000				
Leadership Skill	.290	.365	13.254	.001				

Source: Field Survey: 2024; Dependent Variable: Employability Opportunity (P < 0.05)

Table 4 reveals multiple regression analysis among emotional intelligence, teamwork, conflict resolution skills, and leadership skills portends the relationship between the criterion variable and the linear combination of a set of predictor variables. The R = 65.5% shows the combined relationship of the four variables (emotional intelligence, teamwork, conflict and leadership skills) on employability opportunities. The R² value of 51% shows the total amount of variance accounted for in the criterion (employability opportunities) by the predictor variables (emotional intelligence, teamwork, conflict and leadership skills). The individual variable effects and contributions to employability opportunities reveal that emotional intelligence has 65.5%; teamwork = 47.5%; conflict resolution skill = 23.5%, and leadership skill = 36.5% on employability opportunity at P-value less than 5%. The P-value indicates that P = 0.00) which signifies that the null hypothesis is rejected and accepts the alternate hypothesis that emotional intelligence, teamwork, conflict resolution and leadership skills are predictors of graduates' employability opportunities in the contemporary work environment. Therefore, this study concludes that emotional intelligence, teamwork, conflict resolution, and leadership skills do enhance the employability opportunities of millennial graduates in Nigeria.

Discussion of Findings

The study has revealed a significant path on the requisites and necessary skills needed for graduates' employability in Nigeria. Emerging technologies, and technical, and professional skills are important in the present work environment in Nigeria. The study showed that emerging and disruptive technology is cogent for graduates who are looking for employment and relevance in today's toxic work environment. The study at the same time showed that technical skills are important for graduates

to be competitive in Nigeria's present work environment. The results of the study also revealed that acts of professionalism are critical to sustaining competitive job opportunities in Nigeria's work environment. Professionalism is one of the prominent factors required, graduates are required to be professional in this present work environment in Nigeria. This outcome takes a similar position to the study of Mazzocchi et al., (2024) whose findings established that the 21st-century work environment is characterised by a wave of uncertainty which provoked a considerable shift of employers of labour to emerging technologies, and total professionalism which is a global perception to securing employment.

The second outcome of this study indicated that cross-cultural competence is imperative for graduates in Nigeria's contemporary work environment. The study indicated that cross-cultural competence, the ability to understand, communicate and effectively interact with people across cultures, be it among colleagues, customers, suppliers and all stakeholders is highly important in the employability opportunity. Effective communication and collaborative skills are another sets of qualities needed for graduates' employability in today's present work environment. The result of the study showed that effective communication is an imperative means to be competitive in this twenty-first-century work environment. This study indicates that communication does not always contribute to collaboration rather collaboration will not occur without effective communication. It is remarkable that teams in organisations cannot achieve a goal without exchanging ideas, and knowledge, and collaborating to create and solve problems. The study has established the ability to collectively work towards accomplishing organisational goals. This result shares the same stand with the study of Raub, et al., (2024) whose study finding revealed that communicating effectively and the ability to interact with other colleagues, and stakeholders in a corporate work environment are significant recipes for turbulent work environments.

The third outcome of this study demonstrated that self-adaptive skills are one of the skill sets that is required from graduates and managers in corporate organisations. The study established that the ability to fulfil basic needs for self-care, learning on the job and making decisions for graduates are necessary for employability today. The conceptual skills, self-direction and social problem-solving are norms of self-adaptive skills required from graduates of today. Also, the intrapreneurship skill set, from the study portends that graduates must have the capability of an entrepreneur within the organisation. A self-motivated, proactive, and action-driven graduate who can take the initiative to pursue innovative

products/services for the organisation. This outcome also takes a symmetrical position with the study of Argueta-Rivera et al., (2024) whose study demonstrated that life-long learning and self-adaptability along the path of intrapreneurial spirit will give managers an edge in the competition in the 21st century.

The fourth hypothesis of this study revealed that emotional intelligence, teamwork, conflict resolution, and leadership qualities are imperative and significant for graduates' employability in today's work environment. A self-awareness of oneself and others is highly critical to survive in the volatile and turbulent work environment of Nigeria's corporate business ecosystem. The study has identified that a graduate is required to possess the ability to manage both the emotions of such a graduate and understand the emotions of other people around him. Self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills are all needed and essential skills which are must-haves for Nigerian graduates in today's work environment. Teamwork, the ability to timely resolve issues in the workplace and leadership qualities are all essentials to getting employed in Nigeria's corporate business environment. This outcome has a similar result to the study of Shaibu and Ebenezer-Nwokeji, (2024) whose study revealed that cognitive and affective capabilities along with leadership skill sets are qualities that must be possessed by graduates, managers and whoever wants to sustain the present Nigeria work environment.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Twenty-first-century work environment challenges and employability skills are a point of concern for both employers and job seekers today. Acquiring a university degree by graduates does not guarantee employment in the contemporary work environment anymore. The demand for soft skills and emerging skills needed for jobs have transformed the corporate work environment and requirements for job seekers/graduates. This has changed the focus of employers to overlook the possession of a university degree while employing new hands. Artificial intelligence, emerging technology and other novel skill sets are laying siege to university degrees in today's labour and employment market. Thus, this study offers the following recommendations as follows:

- (a) The university management and government should change the university curricula to reflect the new realities in the labour and employment market. This will assist and enable graduates to be equipped with the necessary skills required to compete in the corporate work environment.

- (b) Graduates must prepare themselves ahead by having cognitive ability aside from a university education. Employers need individuals who can think creatively, have analytical thinking abilities, individual who are curious and ready to learn novel ideas.
- (c) Graduates should focus more on possessing soft skills coupled with university degrees. This will foster employees/graduates to excel in any work environment. Soft skills include effective communication, teamwork and adaptability, and often termed as transferable or interpersonal skills, and are critical for professional success.
- (d) Employees/graduates should possess technical and vocational educations which are highly rewarded in a corporate work environment.
- (e) Graduates should possess cross-cultural skills, and conflict resolutions to survive the challenges of a twenty-first-century work environment.
- (f) Universities/higher institutions of learning as well as graduates should inculcate emotional intelligence in teaching curricula and courses for millennia of youths. Self-awareness of individual emotions and the ability to recognize that of others will attract employers of labour to offer jobs to graduates.

Implication for Practice

This study has established that employability is associated with work and the capability to be employed and sustain employment. It has demonstrated that in reality the ability to gain initial employment, the interest in ensuring that key competence, career drive and understanding concerning the real world of work are embedded not only in the four walls of higher institutions but personal development and soft skills. However, this study showcases the employees and graduates taking the time to identify their employability skills which can help them to establish skill gaps and plan skills development to build a portfolio of skills appreciated by employers, recognize the value of skills and build self-confidence in twenty-first-century work environment.

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