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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Critical Assessment of Strategies for Enhancing Graduate Employability in Nyamagana District, Tanzania: Policy Gaps and Practical Solutions

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ABSTRACT

Global shifts in economic structures and technological advancements have left many developing nations grappling with a mismatch between educational outputs and labor market needs. In Tanzania's Nyamagana District, the issue of graduate unemployment persists despite efforts to reform university curricula and foster entrepreneurship. This study critically evaluates these strategies, arguing that the prevailing focus on soft skills and curriculum reform is insufficient without addressing broader systemic challenges, such as weak industrial development, underfunded technological infrastructure, and inconsistent policy execution. The research, grounded in Human Capital Theory, utilizes qualitative data from interviews with university graduates, employers, and policymakers to explore the intersection of education, policy, and employability. Findings suggest that while curriculum changes and skill development are necessary, they cannot independently resolve graduate unemployment without concurrent policy reforms and increased investment in the country's economic sectors. Recommendations emphasize systemic change, including stronger government-industry collaboration, targeted foreign direct investment (FDI) in high-skill industries, and better integration of technology in higher education.

Keywords: Graduate employability; university curricula; human capital theory; labor market mismatch; skill development; nyamagana district

INTRODUCTION

The issue of graduate unemployment is not merely a challenge of individual skills or qualifications but a symptom of deeper structural inefficiencies within both the educational system and the broader economic environment. While higher education institutions globally aim to equip students with the skills needed to thrive in the job market, in countries like Tanzania, particularly in Nyamagana District, there is a growing disconnect between academic preparation and real-

world employability (Mgaiwa, 2021). The job market increasingly demands technologically adept, adaptable graduates who possess both hard and soft skills, yet the Tanzanian educational system continues to rely on outdated curricula and lacks the resources to keep pace with global advancements.

Human Capital Theory provides a useful framework for understanding this issue, suggesting that individuals' economic success is tied to the skills and knowledge they acquire through education (Becker, 1993).

However, this theory also presumes that the economy will be able to absorb these skills—an assumption that is problematic in regions where the economy itself is underdeveloped or lacks the capacity to create sufficient job opportunities. In Tanzania, even as universities churn out more graduates, the absence of sufficient industry growth, limited technological integration, and ineffective policies have left many educated individuals jobless or underemployed (Munishi, 2022).

This paper aims to critically assess the strategies being implemented to enhance graduate employability in Nyamagana District, Tanzania, and to question whether these strategies address the root causes of unemployment. The study also explores the systemic barriers that undermine these efforts, such as policy gaps, inadequate infrastructure, and the misalignment between education and industry.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Globally, the employability of university graduates has become a central focus of higher education reforms. For instance, in the United Kingdom, the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) was introduced to assess how effectively universities prepare students for employment, which has led to curriculum reforms emphasizing job-ready skills (Jackson, 2017). Similarly, Australia has implemented extensive Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programs, directly engaging students with industries during their studies to better align academic learning with market needs (Jackson & Bridgstock, 2019). These examples highlight how various countries have responded to the employability challenge by bridging the gap between academic education and labor market requirements.

In contrast, sub-Saharan Africa faces a more complex challenge in addressing graduate unemployment, largely due to economic and infrastructural deficiencies. Research indicates that in countries like Kenya and Nigeria, there is a significant mismatch between the skills university graduates possess and the needs of the labor market, leading to persistent unemployment even among those with higher education (Hosain, Mustafi & Parvin, 2021). In Tanzania, scholars such as Kalufya and Mwakajinga (2016) contend that universities continue to produce graduates with academic qualifications that are largely disconnected from the demands of local industries. Meanwhile, policy reforms have not kept pace with these evolving challenges, exacerbating the issue of graduate unemployment.

While curriculum reform is often proposed as the primary solution to graduate unemployment, the literature suggests that this approach may be overly narrow. Munishi (2022) critiques Tanzanian higher education for prioritizing theoretical knowledge over practical skills, which limits graduates' readiness for the job market. However, even if universities were to adopt more practical and industry-aligned curricula, the country's inadequate infrastructure—particularly limited access to technology—would still pose a significant barrier to improving graduate employability.

Moreover, studies like Kamuhabwa (2019) point to structural inefficiencies in policy implementation in Tanzania. Although the government has introduced initiatives, such as the Five-Year Development Plan, to enhance graduate employability, these efforts have been undermined by inconsistent execution and poor coordination between educational institutions and industries. This disconnect creates a situation where graduates are trained for jobs that are either scarce or nonexistent, largely due to slow industrial growth and limited foreign direct investment (FDI) in high-skill sectors (Choi et al., 2020). Thus, addressing these deeper systemic issues is critical for any long-term solution to Tanzania's graduate unemployment crisis.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore the factors affecting graduate employability in Nyamagana District. This method was selected for its ability to provide an in-depth understanding of personal experiences and contextual challenges that are often overlooked by quantitative approaches (Creswell, 2013). Qualitative research is particularly well-suited for examining complex issues such as employability, which involves not only measurable outcomes but also perceptions, policy execution, and industry dynamics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Data were collected through interviews with 37 recent university graduates, 11 local employers, and 5 policymakers. Snowball sampling facilitated the identification of participants by leveraging existing networks of individuals directly engaged with the topic (Noy, 2008). The interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on key themes including the mismatch between educational curricula and labor market needs, technological barriers, and policy gaps (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The use of multiple coders and inter-coder reliability checks minimized researcher bias.

and ensured consistent interpretation of the themes, thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Ethical considerations were integral to the research design. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with confidentiality and anonymity rigorously maintained (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). Given the sensitive nature of the discussions—particularly concerning employment challenges and critiques of government policies—ensuring participant privacy fostered a secure environment for candid responses, thus enhancing the validity of the data collected (Patton, 2002).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal several key issues affecting graduate employability in Nyamagana District. A major concern is the significant mismatch between university curricula and local industry needs, where graduates are often equipped with theoretical knowledge that fails to translate into practical job skills, challenging the assumptions of Human Capital Theory. Additionally, technological barriers exacerbate the problem, as the lack of modern technological training leaves graduates unprepared for a digitalized job market. The study also highlights the limitations of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), which, while contributing to economic growth, often focuses on low-skill sectors and does not align with the skills of highly educated graduates. Finally, entrepreneurship, although promoted as a solution, faces significant obstacles such as inadequate financial support and mentorship, limiting its effectiveness as a viable career path for many graduates. These findings underscore the need for systemic reforms in education, technology, and economic strategies to better align with labor market demands and enhance employability.

Mismatch Between Curriculum and Industry Needs:

One of the major findings of this study is the significant gap between the curriculum taught at universities in Nyamagana District and the skills demanded by local industries. Participants frequently highlighted that while they were equipped with theoretical knowledge, the application of this knowledge to real-world industry contexts was limited. According to Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1993), education is an investment that increases individual productivity and enhances employability. However, this assumes that educational outputs match labor market needs—a premise that the findings challenge.

This issue is echoed by Munishi (2022), who critiques the overemphasis on theoretical knowledge in Tanzanian universities at the expense of practical skills. The data revealed that even with curriculum reforms aimed at enhancing employability, graduates often find that what they have learned does not align with the specific demands of employers. Participant 12's comment, "We are taught theoretical concepts that seem irrelevant when we try to apply them in real job settings," reflects broader concerns about the disconnect between educational content and the requirements of the modern workplace.

In line with Pitan (2016), who emphasized the importance of aligning educational programs with labor market demands, the findings suggest that Tanzania's higher education system has failed to update curricula quickly enough to meet the evolving needs of the economy. This situation undermines the basic tenet of Human Capital Theory, which argues that education leads to better employment outcomes. Without relevant, practical training, the returns on educational investment diminish, leaving many graduates unable to capitalize on their qualifications.

Technological Barriers

Another key finding was the lack of technological infrastructure and skills among graduates, which further impairs their employability. According to Jackson and Bridgstock (2019), technology plays a crucial role in shaping the future of work, and the absence of technological proficiency is increasingly seen as a liability in the global job market. From a Human Capital Theory perspective, technology-related skills are considered a form of specific human capital that can greatly enhance an individual's productivity and marketability (Becker, 1993). However, as several participants noted, universities in Nyamagana District are failing to provide adequate training in this area due to a lack of resources. Participant 8 remarked, "We graduate without basic knowledge of the technologies that are now essential in every job." This gap in technological education is not unique to Tanzania; Hosain, Mustafi, and Parvin (2021) similarly found that in Bangladesh, the lack of digital literacy significantly hampers the employability of graduates. The failure to invest in technological infrastructure and training leaves Tanzanian graduates at a competitive disadvantage, not just locally but globally.

The broader implication, as discussed by Pitan (2016), is that without targeted investments in technology, the human capital developed through higher education will

remain incomplete. Bradley, Quigley, and Bailey (2021) further highlight that institutions unable to keep up with technological advancements fail to prepare students for the digitalized labor markets, which increasingly value adaptability and tech-savviness. In this light, the Tanzanian education system's failure to integrate modern technological tools into the curriculum represents a critical flaw in its approach to human capital development.

The Limitations of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI)

While Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is often viewed as a potential solution to unemployment, the findings from this study reveal that the types of FDI entering Tanzania are not creating suitable jobs for university graduates. Human Capital Theory posits that FDI can drive demand for skilled labor by bringing in new technologies and management practices that increase the productivity of the workforce (Becker, 1993). However, Choi et al. (2020) found that much of the FDI in Tanzania is concentrated in low-skill sectors such as agriculture, mining, and construction, which offer limited opportunities for skilled graduates. As Participant 14 commented, "FDI brings jobs, but they are not jobs for people with degrees like ours—they are jobs for manual labor." This observation is consistent with research by Kamuhabwa (2019), who noted that while FDI contributes to overall economic growth, it often does not benefit highly educated individuals due to a mismatch between the sectors that attract foreign investment and the skills that local graduates possess.

The findings suggest that to make FDI more beneficial for skilled labor, the government needs to direct foreign investment towards high-skill industries such as technology, engineering, and finance. Munishi (2022) similarly argues that unless FDI is targeted toward industries that require highly skilled workers, the returns on human capital investment for university graduates will remain low. This underscores the need for strategic economic planning that aligns educational outputs with the sectors that FDI supports, a view also shared by Prikshat et al. (2019) in their evaluation of FDI and employability in Australia.

Entrepreneurship as a Risky Alternative

The promotion of entrepreneurship as a solution to unemployment emerged as a recurrent theme in this study, but it was met with significant skepticism by participants. Human Capital Theory recognizes entrepreneurship as an alternative way to apply acquired skills for economic gain (Becker, 1993), yet the findings show that without adequate financial support

and mentorship, many graduates are unable to turn their entrepreneurial ideas into sustainable businesses. As Participant 10 observed, "We are encouraged to start businesses, but without financial support or guidance, it is nearly impossible to succeed." This reflects similar findings by Pham, Lim, and Tran (2018) in Vietnam, where entrepreneurship was promoted as a solution to youth unemployment, but the lack of supportive infrastructure led to high failure rates among young entrepreneurs.

The findings also align with Hosain, Mustafi, and Parvin (2021), who argue that without adequate institutional support, entrepreneurship can often exacerbate financial insecurity rather than alleviate unemployment. The lack of access to microfinance and markets limits the ability of Tanzanian graduates to apply their human capital in entrepreneurial endeavors, resulting in wasted potential. Jayasingha and Suraweera (2020) similarly found that while entrepreneurship education is increasingly common in universities, it is rarely accompanied by the necessary practical resources that graduates need to succeed in business.

From a Human Capital perspective, this reflects a failure to fully capitalize on the skills developed through education. While graduates may acquire theoretical knowledge about entrepreneurship, the absence of practical support mechanisms means that the returns on this human capital investment are minimal. This is particularly concerning in a context like Tanzania, where formal employment opportunities are limited, and entrepreneurship is often seen as the only viable alternative for many graduates.

The Human Capital Theory offers a framework for understanding why many of the employability strategies in Nyamagana District are falling short. The theory suggests that investments in education should lead to increased productivity and better employment outcomes (Becker, 1993). However, the findings reveal significant gaps in the practical application of this theory, particularly in relation to the mismatch between the education system and labor market demands, inadequate technological training, misaligned FDI, and unsupported entrepreneurial initiatives.

As noted by Munishi (2022), the Tanzanian education system's failure to align curricula with the actual needs of the economy limits the ability of graduates to reap the expected returns on their educational investment. Similarly, Hosain, Mustafi, and Parvin (2021) emphasize the importance of technological proficiency in enhancing employability, a critical area where

Tanzania is currently lagging. Moreover, the findings support the argument by Choi et al. (2020) that unless FDI is targeted toward high-skill sectors, the human capital accumulated by university graduates will remain underutilized.

Ultimately, this study underscores that while education is a critical component of employability, its value is contingent on systemic factors, such as technology access, industry alignment, and economic infrastructure. Without addressing these broader issues, the human capital developed in Tanzania will continue to be underutilized, leaving graduates without meaningful employment opportunities.

CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The findings of this study indicate that the strategies currently being employed to enhance graduate employability in Nyamagana District are inadequate in addressing the root causes of unemployment. While curriculum reform and soft skills development are important, they are insufficient without addressing broader systemic issues such as technological underdevelopment, limited FDI in high-skill industries, and inconsistent policy implementation. The study also highlights the limitations of relying on entrepreneurship as a solution to unemployment, particularly in an economy that lacks the necessary support structures. Without significant government investment in both education and industry, Tanzania's graduate unemployment problem is unlikely to improve. This requires a shift away from narrow solutions that place the burden of employability on individual graduates and towards systemic reforms that create more sustainable employment opportunities.

Implications of the study Findings

The findings of this study imply that addressing graduate unemployment in Nyamagana District requires a holistic approach that goes beyond curriculum reform and soft skills development. The disconnect between education and the labor market highlights the need for stronger partnerships between universities and industries to equip graduates with relevant, job-ready skills, particularly in technology. Moreover, attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) in high-skill sectors like technology, engineering, and finance is crucial for creating sustainable employment opportunities. The study also reveals that entrepreneurship, while valuable, cannot be a

standalone solution without adequate support structures such as access to finance and markets. Additionally, the findings suggest that government policy must improve in terms of coordination and consistency, ensuring that efforts to enhance employability are aligned and effectively implemented.

Recommendations

To better prepare graduates for the evolving job market, universities should work closely with industries to reform curricula, focusing on integrating practical technology skills and fostering stronger partnerships. This will help ensure that graduates are equipped with the knowledge and abilities needed to be job-ready. Additionally, the government must prioritize investment in technological infrastructure, not only within universities but across the broader economy, to support a workforce that is increasingly dependent on digital skills.

Policies should also focus on attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) in high-skill sectors such as technology, engineering, and finance, rather than low-skill industries. Incentives should be provided to foreign companies to hire locally and invest in skill development programs for Tanzanian workers, ensuring the workforce can meet the demands of these sectors.

Support for sustainable entrepreneurship is another key area, with universities and financial institutions collaborating to provide graduates with access to microfinance, mentorship, and stable markets, empowering them to start and grow viable businesses. Lastly, the government must improve coordination between educational institutions, industries, and policymakers to ensure that employability initiatives are well-integrated, creating clear pathways for graduates into both employment and entrepreneurship.

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