

Exploring the Employability and Relevancy of Arabic Graduates in Southwest Nigeria

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores the employability and relevancy of Arabic graduates in southwest Nigeria. The study helps to analyse the definition of the employability and relevance of Arabic graduates in the Southwest among the Arabic graduates. The study's central phenomenon is to explore employability skills needed for Arabic graduates in Nigeria. The study used a phenomenology study to achieve the research objectives and answer the research questions. A semi-structured interview was used in the study, while 11 participants were interviewed. Inductive analysis was used to analyse the interview transcript. Furthermore, the findings show that employers need employability skills such as soft skills. The result indicates that Arabic graduates lack communication skills, networking, personal competence, and information technology. Thus, the findings cannot be generalised because only a few participants were interviewed. The study also recommends that the policymakers include the English language and graduate employability skills as compulsory courses in the Arabic curriculum to enhance the graduates' speaking skills and employability skills since Nigeria is not an Arabic-speaking country.

Keywords: Employability Skills, Relevancy, Arabic graduate.

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Introduction

In Nigeria, Arabic significantly impacts other languages in the Northern and Southern parts of Nigeria. If we look at the history of the Arabic language, it symbolizes the key to the success of education during Islamic civilisation. Nowadays, people worldwide have started to study Arabic Language and intend to continue their learning of the language to a higher level. Proficiency in the Arabic language and exposure to the culture may equip students for professional opportunities, which can be found in education, international business, law, nursing, social work, Government, and armed forces. Thus, the Arabic language ensures a significant influence on teaching other languages worldwide (Ajape et al., 2015)

The main challenge to be addressed in this research is the lack of employability skills of Arabic graduates, which has become a critical issue for Arabic graduates across geopolitical zones, especially in southern parts of Nigeria. It is said that the employability of graduates requires various elements, from relevant academic qualifications, skills, and specific attributes as needed for the industry (Salisu & Saleh, 2019). In 2017, employability was defined as the ability to operate successfully in character and move between occupations, thus remaining employable in the future (Ahmad et al., 2017).

To further improve the graduates' employability skills, there is a proper need to discuss the graduates' relevancy in society. Meanwhile, the graduates' relevance can be defined as their participation in the quantity and quality of the physical and spiritual energy they devote to extracurricular activities during their university experience. (Ramly et al., 2009). In addition, graduates who acquire proper courses of relevancy are better assured of securing jobs across various industries. Therefore, universities must know their graduates' goals and guide them on how to achieve them.

The position of Arabic in the National Policy on Education (NPE) is in doubt since some crucial curriculum elements, including subject selection, technique, and evaluation, are lagging and prevent students from taking advantage of numerous employment prospects nationwide. In this view, it is reasonable to highlight that the Arabic language curriculum needs an urgent review and repositioning to match the employment opportunities. However, it will assist the student's acquisition of employability skills, such as the capacity for creative thought, making them attractive and resourceful individuals, and nation-building in pursuing national aspirations. Therefore, to effectively cultivate employable skills among the country's

students, it is necessary to incorporate creative thinking skills into the Arabic curriculum. Moreover, according to current studies, critical-thinking abilities in the Arabic curriculum should be prioritised to advance the tertiary institutions' course toward employment potential.

As a result, researchers in Arabic have made many efforts to develop the Arabic language in Nigeria. Still, the Government has not supported the subject despite thousands of students graduating from the department yearly. In Nigeria, Arabic students are always seen as religious leaders among other students in the university because it is always related to the Islamic religion. For that reason, graduates of the Arabic language are always given the privilege of being taught Arabic and Islamic studies in secondary schools.

However, this study will explore the employability and relevancy of Arabic school graduates in Southwest Nigeria. However, there is no doubt that graduates of the Arabic language in Nigerian universities are facing critical issues of unemployment and irrelevancy due to the poor curriculum used in teaching Arabic in various universities (Ajape et al., 2015).

Employability Skills

Aside from technical knowledge, employability skills are the most important in the twenty-first century for competing for jobs and keeping a job in the global industrial market. Unfortunately, Nigerian Arabic graduates lack the employability skills that businesses require, making them unprepared to enter the workforce (Bridgstock et al., 2019). This study examines how the Arabic education curricula offered in Nigerian universities have influenced the employability and relevance of Arabic graduates. An analytical review of the Arabic Education program's curriculum revealed that theory-based courses received more attention than practice-based ones, which impart program skills, and that the curriculum included no courses that specifically taught the skills graduates would need to find employment (Okunuga & Ajeyalemi, 2018). As a result, Arabic graduates do not incorporate employability skills, including problem-solving and decision-making, competencies, and lifetime learning; other topics covered include the necessity of employability skills in Nigeria's Arabic curriculum.

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However, numerous Studies conducted in Southwest Nigeria have shown that Arabic graduates are not prepared to enter the workforce because they lack the employability skills that industries require at the entry level (Lawal, 2017). Industry perceptions generally hold that universities in Southwest Nigeria, in particular, should provide their graduates with employability skills so they may successfully compete for jobs and succeed in the workplace (Omoniwa, 2017). Thus, each program offered by universities nationwide needs to undergo a paradigm shift in the curriculum to equip graduates with employability skills.

Relevancy of Arabic Graduates

Ayuba (2021) added that effort to provide an explanatory study of the relevance of Arabic, which, before the entrance of colonial masters, had established itself in Nigeria as the language of government, literacy, education, history, and law thanks to Islam, to the country's growth. In addition, the Arabic language has contributed to Nigeria's development. The study found that Arabic language instruction through Islamic education began when Islam swept throughout Nigeria. Observations were also made regarding the importance of the Arabic language to Nigeria's past national growth and the adverse effects of its neglect on Nigeria's future progress.

Adeyemi (2016) contends that Arabic has much to give, particularly in religion, education, economics, sociology, diplomacy, and security. The study says Arabic graduates should be given priority and permitted to contribute their fair share to Nigeria's development, reaffirming that the language's significance extends beyond religious boundaries.

Research Questions

1. What do the graduates of Arabic schools understand about their employability and relevancy?
2. What skills are needed for the Arabic graduates in Southwest Nigeria to be employed?

Methodology

In-depth interviews were used in this qualitative study. Qualitative research was beneficial since it enabled the investigation of respondents' personal values, interpretations, and meanings about their actions, living environment, motivations, experiences, and social relationships connected to their jobs (Creswell, 2007). It allowed the researchers to explore the issue

from the participants' viewpoints (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell (2007) and Mwangi (2017), it gave researchers insights into how participants interpreted their experiences and made it possible for them to learn more about the environment in which the study was conducted.

Study Sample

There were 11 participants involved in this research. All the participants graduated from various universities across Southwest Nigeria. One of the most popular sampling techniques, purposeful sampling, classifies participants based on predetermined standards pertinent to a particular research issue (Bukhari, 2021). The sampling procedure targets a specific group of people the researcher aimed to understand, gaining more insight into an individual phenomenon. The exact criteria used in selecting the participants (interviewees) in this current research were due to their experience towards their employability in the country. However, 4 participants were lecturers and secondary school teachers, unlike others who were just Arabic graduates from various universities in southern Nigeria. The researcher purposefully selected the 7 participants who graduated from Arabic and Islamic Studies in different universities in Southwest Nigeria.

Table 1 Table of Study Participants

S/N	Participants	Status	University
1	Participant 1	Lecturer	University of Ibadan
2	Participant 2	Teacher	Tai Solarian College of Education
3	Participant 3	Teacher	Osun State University
4	Participant 4	Graduate	Micheal Otedola College of Primary Education
5	Participant 5	Graduate	University of Ibadan
6	Participant 6	Graduate	University of Ibadan
7	Participant 7	Graduate	Tai Solarin College of Education
8	Participant 8	Graduate	University of Ibadan

9	Participant 9	Teacher	Lagos State University of Education
10	Participant 10	Graduate	Lagos State University
11	Participant 11	Graduate	Micheal Otedola College of Primary Education

Data Collection and Ethical Consideration

In this study, the researchers collected the data for two months. Firstly, participants were not easily identified according to the nature of the research. Afterwards, permission and appointments were made for the selected participants through phone calls.

The entire interview was conducted in English. The interview was audiotaped, and a Samsung G2 phone was also used based on broad experience in the qualitative field. However, each interview took approximately 15-20 minutes. Moreover, a sincere rapport was built with the participant to enhance the conversation and ensure the interview process ran smoothly. After all, the 11 participants were given informed consent because their participation was solely voluntary and to protect the participants' privacy.

Data Analysis

In this study, inductive analysis was used to analyse the data. The interview was transcribed and analysed as soon after the interview because it can help refine or develop more on the interview questions if needed and check whether all research questions have been answered correctly.

This research aimed to explore the employability and relevance of Arabic graduates in the southwestern parts of Nigeria. Hence, it was used as a frame of reference in analysing the transcript and was read a few times to highlight the pattern relevant to the concept. Different steps were taken to code the data since it was done manually. Initially, seven collum roles were drawn to generate the main ideas. It contains informants, interview questions, super-ordinate keywords of the questions, sub-ordinate main points from the conversation (not a summary) elaboration, examples from verbal to support the sub-ordinate, occurrence of main ideas transferred as keywords (s) based on the outline of the sub-ordinate facts (3), frequency of the event, and ordering of discourse unit. After this, the main themes were generated and presented.

Result

This part of the research presents the findings. It analyses the data obtained from individual interviews on the awareness and acceptance of Arabic graduates' employability and relevancy in southwestern Nigeria. Data were extracted and analysed according to the objectives of the study. The analysis of the current research is categorised into themes and sub-themes analysis, which is summarised in the following:

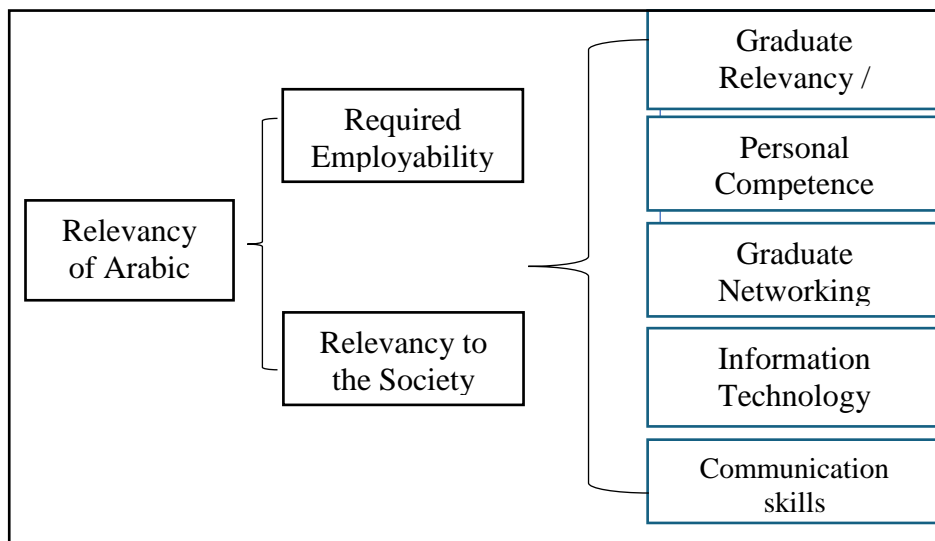


Figure 1: Model of relevance and employability skill needed for Arabic Graduates

Arabic Relevancy

Graduate relevance is to produce graduates with resources for employment in their area and the ability to adjust to the worldwide advancements in science, technology, and the arts (Azmi & Che Hashim, 2020).

"Arabic graduate relevancy in Nigeria". The informant believes that the term means employability, and the relevancy of Arabic graduates means Arabic graduate relevancy in Nigeria. It is essential to the participants that what employability means to the Arabic graduate in Nigeria is "relevancy to the society", according to the informants:

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"Alhamdulillah, the word employability and relevance connote that as a graduate of Arabic (Inf. 1). Employability and relevancy as a graduate of this noble course, which is Arabic studies or Arabic and Islamic studies, I feel this should be the most accepted people in every aspect of the world entirely or in every corner of any" (Inf. 2)

On the other hand, participants also highlighted that the meaning of Arabic relevancy to them is their work experience in society. They mentioned that work skills would show the Arabic graduate's relevance to society. Hence, work experience and relevancy will secure an excellent employability opportunity for the Arabic graduate:

"Work skills are critical and essential when talking about Arabic graduates because most employers prefer someone with relevant skills after graduation. I know I am not employed because my course is irrelevant to most employers and lacks work skills or experience" (info.4).

"Most of the workplaces I have visited for me to be employed, the question-answer is always what else do you study apart from Arabic" (info.8).

"Arabic graduates need to acquire more employability skills for them to be relevant in the labour market because, for me, I think that is the only way out for Arabic graduates to be relevant in our society" (info 9)

From the informants' statements, it is emphasised that Arabic graduates' employability is linked to when the graduate is relevant in the Nigerian Government and to the religious sects in Nigeria.

Networking

Graduates gain employability through social network learning in addition to the university's talent training program (Chen, 2017). It has been demonstrated that networking contributes to the lack of employability and relevancy of Arabic graduates in Southwest Nigeria. Most research informants stated that graduates were hired through personal connections with friends, family, lecturers, and social media platforms. For example,

they were informed of employment openings at schools, organisations, and universities through social media platforms:

"A friend of mine who graduated with me the same year from another English language department got employed for her present job through the Facebook platform; unfortunately, I am not a social media person. I am sure most of my colleagues we graduated together from the Arabic department hardly use social media platforms" (Info. 5)

"My supervisor during my undergraduate linked me up with my present job as a teacher in a private secondary school after my nysc" (Info. 7)

"I got my job through my long-time friend on my Instagram page; when I messaged him and informed him I needed a job, he promised to send a link the second, which he did, and I applied for the online teaching job. Though it is very challenging because I'm not familiar with the use of technology and online teaching" (Info. 8)

"I don't know how to use social media perfectly, so I think it a serious challenge for me" (Info. 9)

"..... I don't have a smartphone to go online in search of job" (Info. 10)

"..... I have submitted different my CV to different schools, but I got no reply from them, I think because I cannot use technology very well" (Info. 11)

Personal Competence

Personal competence is to acquire knowledge and skills. Accordingly, these competencies are utilised throughout the learning process, obtained through learning, and to secure employability (Froehlich et al., 2018). Personal competencies were also mentioned as one of the issues affecting Arabic graduates' employability and relevancy in the Southwest. Informants noted that employers valued employing graduates with personal skills from any academic background. The majority of research informants most frequently

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mentioned self-motivation and responsibility as personal skills or capabilities that supported the employability and relevancy of Arabic graduates:

"The University where I work highlights personal competence as a significant skill for graduates' employability. I think what keeps me in this department today is that I take responsibility for my work and tasks. I always do my best to complete my tasks, even though the results aren't always perfect as expected" (Info. 2).

"Most graduates of Arabic need to monitor their competence because most employers are always eager to employ graduates with personal skills" (Info. 4)

"As an Arabic graduate, I think I need to get more personal skills and self-development to achieve my employability goals" (Info. 5)

"After I started working, I realised that competence is a key affecting Arabic graduates" (Info. 6)

"One of the major challenges facing Arabic graduates is lack of self-awareness" (Info. 7)

Communication skill

Communication skill is the process of information flow when information is sent from one person to another by vocal and nonverbal means. In this case, using a particular language and a two-way process with feedback on the message received makes verbal communication the most popular (Bharathi, 2016). Researchers found that employability skills are a significant issue that must be addressed. Interviewees cited communication skills as one of the fundamental academic abilities supporting job opportunities in Nigeria. Since dealing or communicating with clients and other coworkers is a daily part of a job, good communication is very crucial to every employer:

"My communication skills are a shortcoming, hen hen. I don't speak English well. Perhaps there are persons [other

people] who possess greater confidence [than I do]". (Info.1)

"As a lecturer, one of the major challenges I had when I started working is communication issues; I remember vividly that my communication skill is very poor, even to communicate in the English language was very difficult for me" (Info. 2).

"Most of us who did Arabic in the university then were not aware of our communication skills; to me, this has affected our employability skills" (Info. 4)

"I found it very difficult to communicate while in the general meeting at work" (Info. 7)

"Yes, it is effortless; one is we have to ensure that our graduates are well grounded in the language, they understand very well, and they use it by way of communication" (Info. 8). "Communication skills and they are also able to write Arabic, and they could also be, they should also be good in the translation of Arabic". (Info. 10)

Information Technology

Information technology is a more practical computing subject. It focuses on fulfilling user needs in an organisational and societal environment by carrying out computing technology-related tasks such as creation, integration, administration, application, and selection (Lawal, 2017). The interviewees highlighted that information technology is essential when discussing employability, especially in the global era. For anyone to ignore the use of information technology in this global economy, it is not easy to discuss graduate employability. It was evident that every organisation in Nigeria today has included the use of information technology such as computer and telecommunication application development in their workplace for them to improve their productivity:

"In this modern era, Arabic students need to learn how to use all this technology, just like me, who does not know how to use technologies like computers and how to operate my

phone. I will have to give it to my children to do for me"
(Info. 1).

"The first interview I went for when I needed a job, I was rejected because I cannot use Microsoft Word appropriately during the interview." (Info. 2)

"We did not have the opportunity to operate the computer when I was during my undergraduate programme" (Info. 4)

"Technology is one of the reasons why some companies have been able to achieve their goals; for any Arabic graduate to be employed, he/she needs to acquire ICT skills" (Info.5)

Discussion

The current study explores the employability and relevancy of Arabic graduates in Southwest Nigeria. The present study reveals what the Arabic graduates understand about employability and relevancy. The participants in the study also mentioned that graduate relevance is when the graduate shows his employability capabilities in the labour market. This occurred because companies favoured candidates with prior work experience in the sector of interest. Employers thus employed relevant work experience as one of the requirements for determining an applicant's suitability for a position. According to the current study, several skills need to be acquired by Arabic graduates in order for them to be employed and be relevant in society. These skills include work experience, networking, personal competence, communication skills, and information technology. When considering the Arabic language's function in society as a discipline of individual management, one can better understand the value of this language to employability.

Work experience is another issue facing Arabic graduates in Southwest Nigeria. The result shows that employers prefer to employ graduates with work experience. Helyer & Lee (2014) cited that most interns wanted to participate in the internship programme because it allowed them to experience paid employment. Other general reasons were to gain work experience and improve their employability skills. Informants highlighted the lack of networking among the Arabic graduates in Southwest. It was mentioned that most graduates used different ways to create networking among their lecturers, friends, and family through social

media platforms. In situations where human or financial resources would typically be needed, networking generates a variety of beneficial social capital, such as advocacy, introductions, mentoring, and social connections, in particular, can give access to career management tools that improve employability and relevancy among the graduates of Arabic graduates (Batistic & Tymon, 2017).

This study also mentioned personal competence as another skill for Arabic graduates. Their competencies mainly determine a graduate's employability. Additionally, they are a necessary addition to the academic curriculum vitae and crucial to the hiring process. Graduate personal competence refers to system-related skills that call for a blend of compassion, understanding, and expertise to comprehend how the various components of a whole interact and function. In contrast to any job domain, personal flexibility or personal competence refers to the capable response to changes in job tasks and work techniques (Froehlich et al., 2018). As a result, Arabic graduates with high levels of personal competence can create and implement solutions in unique circumstances, which enables them to become skilled in related and new professional fields. The response from the informants indicates that Arabic language graduates need to acquire personal competencies to secure employment.

Based on the study findings, communication skills and communication fear among Arabic graduates or lack of confidence were other significant findings from the qualitative analysis of this study. According to the findings, respondents experienced anxiety during their job interviews because they believed they lacked basic communication skills. Speaking about their lack of communication skills, informant 1 and Informant 2 both expressed how their anxiety when communicating affected their confidence, which they believed contributed to their subpar performance in the job interview. It is possible to deduce from these comments that communication anxiety and the performance of Arabic graduates in Southwest Nigeria are closely related to general communication abilities affecting their ability to secure job opportunities. In a survey of significant employers, Moore & Morton (2017) discovered that employers had similar opinions about students' communication skills. Based on this, they concluded that the best way to close these gaps and "to satisfy employers' needs for graduates who are prepared for the workforce" is through "experiential learning". In addition to skills needed to be employed are information technology skills, a theme in this study.

The employability and relevance of Arabic graduates are indicators of the Caliber of skills and competencies acquired through a top-notch

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education from academic institutions that meet industrial demands. In line with the informants' responses, attention was drawn to the use of information technology by Arabic graduates. It was discussed that most of them, as graduates, find it challenging to use all these modern technologies. At the same time, some mentioned that it has been their primary challenge not to be employed, which was emphasised by informant 5. Tapado et al. (2018) added that there is a need to increase the number of subjects related to information technology, provide more electives to help graduates become more competent in IT, or raise the total number of hours required for their on-the-job training according to the employers' view on graduates IT skills. In the context of this study, it was evident that the graduate of Arabic language has little IT skills.

Study Limitations and Strengths

This study's results include several limitations; thus, interpretation should be done cautiously. The present study had a restricted participant count, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other graduates of Nigerian universities. Second, the participants were graduates from 4 universities in Southwest Nigeria, under-sampling subsequent graduates of the Arabic language and Islamic Studies department. Due to this, an incomplete picture of the variables may have emerged when exploring the employability and relevance of Arabic graduates in Southwest Nigeria. Although these results have limits, they could help Nigerian universities create curricula that incorporate all the elements required to prepare students for the workforce. Since the outcomes of such studies can be transferred to other geographical areas across Nigeria and similar settings, more research with a more diverse sample of participants from different regions and with varied specialisations is advised.

Conclusion

The current study lists several supportive themes for Nigerian university graduates' employability. A graduate's probability of securing a job was significantly enhanced by networking with lecturers, colleagues, and family and having work experience relevant to the position given by a company or institution. University graduates' chances of finding employment were also improved by personal competencies, underlying academic abilities like communication, and character traits like flexibility and integrity. The results show the importance of including adequate communication skills in

university study programs to allow students to enter the workforce without any communication fear. Additionally, adequate information technology is essential for students to build relationships with others and find employment following graduation since that is one way to keep networking worldwide.

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Author Contributions

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