Development And Validation Of Employability Readiness Scale For University Undergraduates In North-Central Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study developed and validated an Employability Readiness Scale for University Undergraduates (ERSUU) in North-Central Nigeria. The dearth of reliable employability readiness scale for assessing employability skills of undergraduate students and the increasing high rate of unemployment among graduates which had resulted from mismatch between the skills possessed by graduates and the skills desired by employers of labour in modern global economy prompted the study. The population of the study comprised of 33,980 final year university undergraduates in 2021/2022 academic session. A sample of 1,093 students was drawn from the population using a proportional stratified sampling technique. A 56-items Employability Readiness Scale for University Undergraduates (ERSUU), which measured the level of possession of employability skills was developed and validated by the researchers and was used for data collection. The data collected were analyzed using exploratory factor analysis technique and Cronbach alpha method. The Kaiser's rule (eigenvalue ≥ 1) and scree plot were adopted in extraction of four factors as underlying structures of the scale. The factors were labelled creativity, analytical and lifelong learning skills, entrepreneurial and team spirit skills, technological skills and effective communication skills based on the description of factor loading of the items. Seven experts from different fields judged the relevance and adequate representation of the items of the ERSUU in terms of the universal content of the constructs measured. The index of logical validity of 0.95 and the reliability coefficient of 0.92 were established for the ERSUU. It was found that factor analysis and reliability results provided clear evidence for construct validity and reliability of the scale. The study recommended that the scale could be used as a diagnostic tool for identifying the areas of strengths and weaknesses of undergraduate students' possession of employability skills before they venture into the world of works.

Keywords*: Development, Validation, Employability Readiness Scale*

I. INTRODUCTION

University education is a critical component of human capital development in the global world, which focuses on equipping individuals with the high-level skills needed for their survival, and for national development. The university as a service institution aims at equipping students with employability skills to make them employable after graduation and to instill in them the drive for self-employment. The use of any employability readiness scale is to aid in the assessment of employability skills possessed by undergraduate students before they graduate and venture into the world of work.

Employability skills also referred to as soft skills are the key, core, life and essential skills as well as the competencies, necessary, and transferable skills that make individuals more apt to get a job and/or be successfully self-employed in the modern economy. There are different employability or job readiness skills these include communication skills, analytical power skills, team spirit skills, creativity skills, entrepreneurial skills, lifelong learning skills and information and communication technology skills among others (Zubaidah, 2016).

One of the major concerns of stakeholders in the education sector the world over is the employability readiness of graduates from the tertiary institutions. Employers, universities and professional bodies have posited that nations all over the world should develop professionals who are highly skilled and ready to face the challenges

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of increased competition in the labour market (Adewale, 2013). This implies that employability skills are considered as essential qualifications for employment in the modern economy and have become necessary for employment success at all levels within the business environment.

However, some stakeholders in the economy are dissatisfied with the level of preparedness of graduates entering into the world of work because there seems to be a mismatch between the skills possessed by graduates and the skills which are highly desired by employers of labour (Ibrahim, 2022). It is expected that apart from the basic academic knowledge (hard skills), the products from universities should possess additional personal qualities and competencies (soft skills) that will facilitate the most successful and speedy transition from higher education to the workplace and enhance their self-employment capacity. The modern workplace requires graduates who have versatile information technology skills, good communication skills and sound creative abilities among others, which are lacking in many of the graduates turned-out into the economy.

There are also inadequate job spaces available to accommodate increasing number of graduates turned-out from the universities; this is because Nigeria is experiencing a rapid population growth without a commensurate increase in the number of job spaces provided by the government and the private sectors to absorb the growing applicants. For example, the nation's population as at 1960 was about 45 million and this rose to about 122 million in the year 2000 and the projected population for the year 2021 was about 212 million people and about 217 million people for the year 2022 (Macrotrend, 2022). The labour force for the nation rose from 81.15 million people in the fourth quarter of the year 2016 to 90.47 million people in the third quarter 2018 and to over 100 million people in the year 2021 (Nigeria Bureau of Statistics (NBS), 2021). The rapid increases in the population and by extension the labour force of Nigeria could be among other factors responsible for the increasing high rate of graduates' unemployment in the country.

The Federal Government of Nigeria through the National Universities Commission (NUC) have made efforts to equip students with employability skills in the course of their schooling (Olorundare & Kayode, 2014). This has led to the introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and Entrepreneurial courses across the universities in Nigeria including the ones in North-Central Nigeria as measures to inculcate employability skills and to promote self-employment after graduation from school to reduce the rate of unemployment in the country.

In spite of the different efforts made by the Nigerian government to create jobs and reduce unemployment over the years, the menace has persisted among the youths. The NBS reported that there is a consistent rise in unemployment rate among young people of between ages 15-35 years in Nigeria. For instance, the unemployment rate rose from 6.4% in the fourth quarter of 2014 to 16.6% in the third quarter of 2017. In addition, it rose from 21.8% in the first quarter of 2018 to 27.1% in second quarter of 2020 and further rose to 33.3% in the fourth quarter of 2020. Similarly, Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdele (KPMG, 2023) reported that Nigerian unemployment rate rose to 37.7% at the fourth quarter of 2022 and projected that the rate will rise to 40.6% by the end of 2023 and 43.9% by year 2024.

The foregoing statistical data reveal a worrisome economic situation for Nigeria as a country. This is because the implication of the rising rate of unemployment as being experienced include high rate of dependency ratio, poverty, depression resulting to high rate of suicide among young people and other sorts of criminal behavior such as internet fraud, armed robbery, banditry, oil bunkering and kidnapping (Isuku, 2017). Hence, the need to develop and validate a reliable employability readiness scale that will help in determining the employability skills possessed by undergraduate students in North-Central Nigeria. The scale will provide relevant and useful information about the employability skills of undergraduate students in the zone and also produce a valid and reliable research instrument which can be used by stakeholders including policy makers and curriculum planners in the education sector across the nation who intend to measure the level of the undergraduate students' preparedness in terms of their possession of employability skills before transition into the labour market.

The research is hinged on the theory of Key to Employability Model. The Key to Employability Model was developed by Pool and Sewell in 2007. The theory posits that employability is a set of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes that make individuals more likely to choose and secure occupations they can excel in and be successful in life. The theory focuses on different facets that allow students to adapt to the demands of the new world of work and better prospects for career success and satisfaction. The theory posits that, in addition to the acquisition of basic academic skills taught in the classroom; graduates should possess other employability skills such as good communication skills, analytical skills, entrepreneurial skills, lifelong learning skills, creativity skills, and information and technology skills, which formed the sub scales of the Employability Readiness Scale for University Undergraduates (ERSUU) developed for the study.

The aim of the study was to develop and validate an employability readiness scale for undergraduate students in federal universities in the North-Central Nigeria. In order to achieve the aim of the study, the following research questions were raised:

1 What is the content validity index of the Employability Readiness scale for University Undergraduates (ERSUU)in North-Central Nigeria?

2   What are the factor structures of the ERSUU?
3   What are the dimensions of the scale?
4   What are the reliability coefficients of internal consistencies of ERSUU and the different subscales?

II.   METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the Instrumentation research design. The instrumentation research design was adopted in developing the instrument for the study. It involved identifying the skills and sub skills of the scale, creating a scale description through specifying the skills and contents covered and selecting appropriate item format as well as conducting a factor analysis of the items of the scale. The instrumentation design was employed to generate items on the scale, to pilot test and to establish the validity and reliability of the scale.

The population of the study comprised of all the 33,980 final year undergraduate students in 2021/2022 academic session in the federal universities in North-Central Nigeria. Three federal universities were purposively sampled from the seven federal universities in the region. The three universities sampled were University of Jos, University of Ilorin and University of Abuja. These were conventional universities which offer broad range of courses across different faculties than others in the region; those either are specialized institutions with limited range of courses or are newly established institutions. The sampled universities offer all courses including the ones offered in the specialized universities in the region. A sample of 1,093 undergraduate final year students were selected using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula for determining sample size and the criteria for sample size for empirical studies.

The purposive and proportional stratified sampling techniques were used for the selection of the sample from the population of each of the sampled universities. The purposive sampling technique is a non-probability sampling technique, which allows a researcher to select a sample that meets the criteria of the defined population based on the research problem (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2017). The proportional stratified sampling technique on the other hand, involves the use of uniform sampling fraction to draw units from each stratum in a situation where the strata are not equal in size (Bhandari, 2021). The use of proportional stratified sampling was necessary since the students were from different faculties with varied population sizes across the sampled universities.

The items of the ERSUU were developed by the researchers after extensive review of relevant literatures. The content validity of the ERSUU was established through subjecting the instrument to the scrutiny of seven experts; two from Educational Research, Measurement and Evaluation, two from Educational Psychology, and one each from Economics Education, Management sciences and Computer science from the different universities to examine the extent to which the items on the scale measured the construct of the dimensions of the scale, as well as if the items adequately covered the relevant aspects of the construct being measured. The construct validity of the ERSUU was also established through factor analysis to determine the extent to which employability skills of the students can be interpreted in terms of certain psychological constructs such communication skills, analytical skills, ICT skills, team spirit skills, lifelong learning skills, and entrepreneurial skills used in the study.

The data collected were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software. Frequency count and simple percentages were used to analyzed experts' judgment of the content validity of the scale. Responses by undergraduate students from the scale were coded and factor analysis was used to determine the factor structure of the instrument, while reliability analysis was run to determine the Cronbach alpha coefficient of internal consistency reliability of the scale and its subscales. To establish the factor structure of the ERSUU Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was carried out to explore possible underlying factor structure of a set of observed variables without imposing preconceived structures on the outcome Glen (2021). Furthermore, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity were used to assess the suitability of data for factor analysis. The KMP index was 0.88 indicating that the correlation matric was factorable. The Bartlett's test for this scale was highly significant ($p<0.001$) and therefore factor analysis was appropriate (Jim-Frost, 2022), this is present in Table 2.

III.   RESULTS

Content Validity of Employability Readiness Scale for University Undergraduates (ERSUU)

The experts' judgment of the relevance and adequate representation of the items of the ERSUU in term of the universal content of the construct being measured shows that the scale had an index of logical validity of 0.95. This was judged to be good and adequate.

Table 1: Percentage Agreement in Experts' Responses on Content Validity of the ERSUU

S/N	Area of Judgement	EXPERTS						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.	Clarity of purpose	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
2.	Confidentiality statement	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
3.	Appropriateness of language	10	10	10	10	10	10	10

4.	Clarity of directions	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
5.	Appropriateness of personal data	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
6.	Representativeness of content relatedness to construct	10	10	0	0	10	10	10
7.	Comprehensiveness of scale	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
8.	Match between title of scale and content	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
9.	Appropriateness of length	10	0	10	10	10	10	10
10.	Adequacy of items	10	10	10	10	10	10	10
	Total	100%	90%	90%	90%	100%	100%	100%
	Percentage Agreement in Response NB. (Index of Logical Validity=	670/700 x 100 = 95% 0.95)						

Factor Structure of Employability Readiness Scale for University Undergraduates

Principal Components Analysis (PCA) was conducted to confirm the appropriate number of factors extracted because no prior theory or model existed as recommended by Glen (2021). Adegoke (2013) also recommended the PCA for use in establishing preliminary solutions in Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and the use of multiple criteria for factor extraction. They include Kaiser's criteria (eigenvalue > 1 rule), Scree test, cumulative percentage variance extract and 50-60% explained variance threshold for stopping extraction of factors. The PCA was run using 56 items and 15 factors were extracted accounting for 76.70% variance. This simply means that the 15 factors that loaded with eigenvalue greater than 1 are responsible for 76.70% variations in the undergraduate students' response in terms of the level of employability skills they possessed. Factor 1 contributed the highest percentage variance with 26.00% with eigenvalue of 14.56 while factor 15 contributed the least percentage variance of 1.90% with eigenvalue of 1.06. The summary of this was presented in Table 3.

Table 2: Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett's test of Sphericity

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.880
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	19845.682
	df	903
	Sig.	.000

Table 3: Percentage Cumulative Variance for ERSUU

Factors	Eigenvalues	% Variance	Cumulative %
1.	14.56	26.00	26.00
2.	4.03	7.20	33.21
3.	3.32	5.94	39.15
4.	2.70	4.83	43.98
5.	2.61	4.67	48.65
6.	2.47	4.41	53.07
7.	2.04	3.65	56.73
8.	1.80	3.22	59.95
9.	1.66	2.96	62.91
10.	1.46	2.60	65.52
11.	1.41	2.53	68.05
12.	1.35	2.42	70.48
13.	1.26	2.26	72.75
14.	1.15	2.05	74.80
15.	1.06	1.90	76.70

The elbowing point in the scree plot occurred between 4th and 5th components, with 43.98% of the variance accounted for by the first-four components (all with eigenvalues >1.0). The scree plot was shown in Figure 1. The researchers chose the fourth factor based on Kaiser (1974) recommendation.
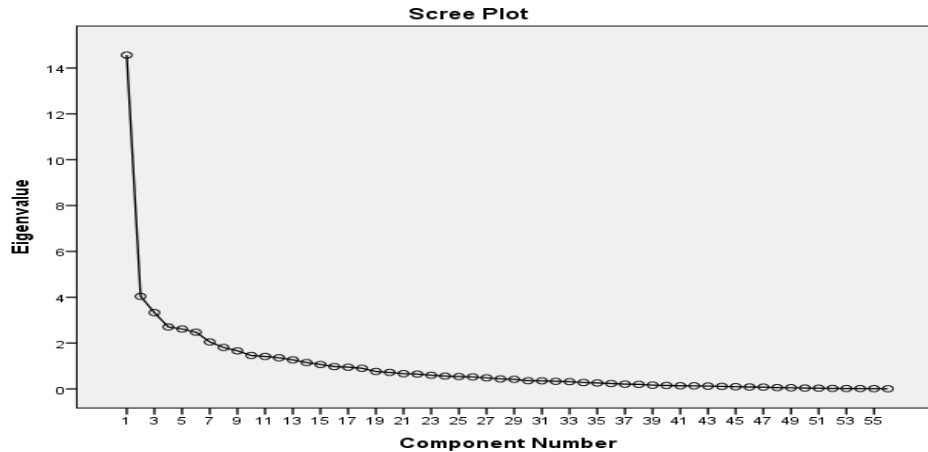
Figure 1 Scree plot for Employability Readiness Scale for University Undergraduates (ERSUU)

Therefore, since the items on the scale were uncorrelated, Orthogonal Varimax rotation method was employed. The result in Table 4 shows that items loadings less than 0.40 were excluded and the analysis yielded a four-factor solution with a simple structure (factor loadings ≥ 0.40). Thus, the items that do not load on any factor and those that loaded on several factors (4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 18, 22, 29, 36, 37, 40, 43, 56) were considered complex and discarded (Bruin, 2011). The items that loaded on each factor were carefully studied and labeled appropriately based on the underlying tone of the items. Table 4 gives a description of the factor loading of each of the items.

Table 4: Rotated Component Matrix for 43 items

COMPONENTS	1	2	3	4
Q16: Social Network/media	0.662			
Q17: Challenging Assignment	0.697			
Q19: Adapting to changes	0.636			
Q20: Develop Alternatives	0.609			
Q21: Better ways	0.521			
Q23: Solve Problem	0.447			
Q24: Identify Problem	0.754			
Q25: Initiate Changes	0.744			
Q26 Creativity in Suggestions	0.648			
Q27: New Perspective	0.742			
Q28: Innovative	0.653			
Q30: Provide Solutions	0.616			
Q31: Creative	0.593			
Q32: Exploration	0.525			
Q33: Self-improvement	0.590			
Q34: Self Development	0.604			
Q35: Application of knowledge	0.649			
Q38: Personal Development	0.506			
Q39: Learning skills		0.412		
Q41: Listening Skill			0.451	
Q42: Problem Solving Skills			0.437	
Q44: Team Spirit			0.538	
Q45: Active in Group			0.519	
Q46 Listening Skills			0.560	
Q47 Provide Assistance		0.494		
Q48 Work with others		0.432		
Q49 Business Opportunity			0.523	
Q50 Business Plan			0.434	
Q51 Business Idea			0.530	
Q52 Raise Capital			0.494	
Q53 Association		0.434		
Q54 Self employ skill		0.510		

Q55	Risk Taking	0.588			
Q10	Internet Surfing Skills			0.745	
Q12	Coding and Programming		0.801		
Q13	Spread Sheeting and Analysis		0.649		
Q14	Computer Presentation skills		0.739		
Q15	Emailing Skills			0.818	
Q1	Fluency				0.618
Q2	Comprehension				0.527
Q3	Writing Skills				0.644
Q6	Reporting skills				0.629
Q9	Computer Skills				0.478
Number of items		**19**	**14**	**5**	**5**

Dimensions of Employability Readiness Scale for University Undergraduates (ERSUU)

The final scale is made up of four factors and forty-three items that loaded on them. Nineteen items loaded on Factor 1. The items that loaded on this factor relate to creativity, lifelong and problem-solving ability of the students. This factor was labeled "Creativity, Analytical and Lifelong learning Skills". Fourteen items loaded on the second factor. The factor reported self-employment and team Spirit skills possessed by the students. This factor was labeled "Entrepreneurial and Team-spirit Skills". Five items loaded on the third factor. The factors relate to the computer operating skills possessed by the students. The factor was labeled "Technology Skills". The five factors that loaded on factor four reported the level of communication skills possessed by the students. The factor was labeled "Effective Communication skills". The dimension of the final ERSUU was presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Dimensions of the Employability Readiness Scale for University Undergraduates after Factor Analysis

S/N	ERSUU Factors	No. of items	Description	Items
1	Creativity, Analytical and Life-long learning Skills	19	The items reported the extent to which the students can come up with novel ideas to improve a given situation. It also shows the level of problem-solving ability the students possess.	16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 38 and 39
2.	Entrepreneurial and Team Spirit Skills	14	The items are related to identifying business opportunities, developing business plan and raising capital to start a business and the ability to function in a group to achieve common goals.	41, 42, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54 and 55
3.	Technological Skills	5	The items showed the level of proficiency the students have in surfing the internet, writing computer programmes, making use of the computer to carry out analysis and making presentations.	10, 12, 13, 14 and 15
.	Effective Communication Skills		The items reported the level of communication skills possess by the students. The items relate to writing ability, fluency in speaking, reporting and emailing skills.	1, 2, 3, 6 and 9
	TOTAL	**3**		

Reliability Coefficient of Internal Consistencies of ERSUU and its Sub-Scales

The reliability of internal consistencies of the ERSUU were determined using Cronbach coefficient alpha. The coefficients of internal consistencies are presented in Table 6. The reliability coefficient of the instrument on Employability Readiness Scale (ERSUU) was 0.92, this is judged to be high and adequate. This shows that the scale is reliable and will yield the same result over time.

Table 6: Internal Consistency Reliability Coefficients for Employability Readiness Scale for University Undergraduates (ERSUU) and sub-Scales

ERSUU Sub Scales	Number of items	Internal Consistency (α)
1. Creativity, Analytical and Lifelong learning skills	19	0.88
2. Entrepreneur and Team Spirit skills	14	0.81
3. Technology Skills	5	0.74
4. Effective Communication skills	5	0.71
ERSUU	**43**	**0.92**

IV.   Discussion

The finding on research question one presented in Table 1 showed that the scale has content validity. The table describes the extent to which experts judged the content of the scale in relation to the construct measured. The index of logical validity was 0.95 which was considered high and adequate. Therefore, the implication of the judgment of the experts is that the items of the ERSUU were adequate and suitable to measure the employability skills in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

The findings from research question two presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4 shows that the data collected passed the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test of sample adequacy and Bartlett's sphericity test of suitability of data for factor analysis which lend credence to the factor structures of the scale. The findings and the factor structure of the Employability Readiness Scale for University Undergraduates (ERSUU) corroborates with the findings of Ekpoh (2015), Abdul-Hamid et al. (2014) and Husain et al. (2012) who reported that the various employability skills explored in their studies were the same with the sub scales of the ERSUU. Furthermore, Table 4 showed that out of the four factors were extracted from the scale 19 items loaded on factor one, 14 items that loaded on factor two, 5 items loaded on factor three, while 5 items loaded on factor four. Thus, there were 43 items that loaded on four factors after the factor analysis while 13 items were eliminated from the scale. These findings corroborate with Ekpoh (2015) who found that similar factors were extracted in the work after factor analysis. Therefore, the findings signifies that the employability skills factors extracted were relevant in enhancing the employability skills of undergraduate students in universities in the North-Central Nigeria and beyond and the need for them to be adequately explored by the students to enhance their being employable in the global economy.

The finding on the reliability estimates for research question three for the Employability Readiness Scale for University Undergraduates (ERSUU) presented in Table 8 showed that the scale was reliable. The coefficients for the sub scales on: creativity, analytical and lifelong learning skills was 0.88, entrepreneurial and team spirit skills was 0.81, technological skills had 0.74, and effective communication skills had reliability coefficient of 0.71. The reliability coefficient of the entire ERSUU was 0.92. These were judged to be high and adequate as suggested by Price, Jhangiani, Chiang, Leighton and Cuttler (2020). The estimates further showed that the items on the scale were homogeneous and reliable. The implication of the findings is that the scale was reliable and could be used to measure the employability skills of university undergraduate overtime and that the scale would yield consistent results on the constructs measured.

Therefore, from the findings of the study it can be deduced that the ERSUU was a valid and reliable scale to be used to assess the level of preparedness in terms of employability skills possessed by undergraduate students while on campus before venturing into the world of works.

V.   Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study it was concluded that Employability Readiness Scale for University Undergraduates in North-Central Nigeria (ERSUU) was a valid and reliable employability readiness scale which can be used to measure the employability skills of final year undergraduate students in Nigeria. It was also recommended that the ERSUU should be used at interval as deem fit by university authorities as a diagnostic tool to assess the level of employability skills possessed by undergraduate students before graduating from the university. This will help in determining the areas of strengths and weaknesses in term of the employability skills possessed by the students to create an avenue for enhancing the provision of remedial programmes to the students before venturing into the labour market.

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