



PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF WORK-BASED LEARNING ON STUDENTS' EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS

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Abstract

The study assessed the influence of Work-Based Learning (WBL) on Students' employment prospects. The paper sought answers to the research question raised. A mixed-method research design was used for the study. A sample of 81HND I OTM students was used for the study. Work-Based Learning on Students' Employment Prospects Questionnaire (WBLSEPQ) was used to collect data from the respondents. A total of 81 copies were administered and 76 copies were retrieved and used for the study. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the data collected to answer the research question. Independent samples t-test statistic was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that work-based learning is perceived to have a positive effect on students' employment prospects because it provides students with an opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge in real work situations. The study recommended among others that there should be collaboration between the school and industries for curriculum creation and implementation and students should be trained on how to properly use tools and equipment. Such an experience will go a long way in improving their confidence and overall readiness to take up a job in future.

Keywords: Work-based Learning, Students, Employment prospects

Introduction

Work-Based Learning is an instruction-led programme developed by higher education institutions (perhaps in partnership with a specific employer's professional/regulatory body) to develop strong academic and workplace knowledge by employing work experience as source of learning. According to McIlveen, Mcnamara, Kift, Butler, Field, Brown and Gamble (2011), work-based learning is the term given to an activity that integrates academic learning with its application in the workplace. It is widely used to describe situations where students spend time in a workplace setting as part of learning (Schilling & Klamma, 2010). Work-Based Learning gives students the prospect to explore what they have learned in the classroom within a real-world situation. Johnson, and Watts (2013) defined Work-based learning as an educational strategy that helps students with hands-on learning. It also gives learners some much-needed path and allows them to know what to do after graduation. It, therefore, extends the boundaries of the classroom to the work world (National Centre on Secondary Education and Training (NCSET) 2011).

Work-Based Learning affords learner sample opportunities to learn a variety of skills that guarantee synergistic relationships between the school and the world of work. It is an attempt to narrow the gap existing between theory and practice thereby, making meaningful learning possible. It serves as a source of ideas for organizations and develops industry support for institutions.



Gomez, Lush and Clements (2014) stated that students taking work placement exhibit improved academic performance in their final year of study. Dearing (2017) showed that work-based learning enhances academic performance, as it helps students to exhibit a great difference in their academic performance after the exposure. Akinremi (2018) in his finding proved that when students are exposed to WBL programme, they improve in classroom activities due to skills acquired during their Work-based learning. It is widely regarded as a point of difference in developing graduate employability by enhancing skill outcomes such as teamwork, communication, employment prospects, student understanding of the world of work, self-management and problem solving (Chapman et al., 2005).

Burgstahler (2001) stated that work-based learning allows students to apply academic and vocational skills and knowledge to real work situations as they develop the attitudes, values and behaviors that will help them become informed citizens and productive workers. Situated conceptions of learning have revealed how learning in natural settings, such as the workplace, results from participation in socially valued activities within communities of practice (Miao & Hoppe, 2011). Further, it allows students to try various careers on a day-to-day basis to provide exposure which can help identify what career choices they want to make or do not want to make. Work-based learning can introduce students to adults who may act as mentors and positive role models.

A work-based learning programme offers opportunities to students through work experiences where students can apply what they learn in school to the world of work. It links them to the “real world” (Smith, Petty, Oughton & Alexander, 2010). Miao and Hoppe (2011) highlighted that work-based learning is based on a Socio-cultural understanding of learning rooted in “Activity Theory” (Vygotsky, 1962), as well as situated learning and the community of practice approach. Miao and Hoppe (2011) stated that in an ideal work-based learning programme, learning opportunities arise from normal work practices and the curriculum is based on work needs and adapted to each individual and each work environment. Experiencing the work environment not only exposes students to the possibilities of jobs and careers, but the experiences also help students connect classroom studies to practical applications of those studies in the workplace. In addition to learning technical job skills, students can enhance personal and social competencies related to working in general.

Work-Based Learning can be seen as instructional activities that bridge the gap between classroom theoretical knowledge with practical knowledge to develop the total educational programme of students. According to Ukwueze, (2011), WBL has a positive impact on students' career success. Chukwuedo (2011) opined that WBL enhances the competency of students in the workshop/laboratory, improves students' classroom learning creates employment opportunities.

Work-based learning is a planned, supervised training and intervention programme based on stated and specific earning and career objectives, leading to the development of occupational competencies of participants. It also exposes and prepares students in institutions of higher learning for the work situations that they are to meet after graduation. It equally helps to familiarize students with work methods and expose them to necessary experiences to handle equipment and machinery that are not available in their institutions. Workplace learning is concerned not only with immediate work competencies but with future competencies. Work-Based Learning is gaining serious pull on an international scale.

The primary concern in work-based learning is that it should provide students with the attributes for employability. Smith and Comyn (2013) confirmed “the importance of the workplace as a site for learning and developing employability skills”. The development of employability skills plays an important part in human resource management and training plans.

Credible work-based learning environment must be seen to be conducive and worker/student friendly. Thus, Okorie in Castillo (2012) contended that workshops, laboratories and the overall building technology environment must be adequately equipped to reflect the actual working environment beyond the classroom. The author stated further that the school environment should expose students to the use of basic building equipment in a way that will lead students to acquire



relevant knowledge and skills. Okorie added that the skills being developed by students in training are necessarily limited by the availability of equipment and tools. In a workshop where there are insufficient tools, the students will be grouped by the teachers during practical work so that each group will be given a set of few tools to practice with. In such a workshop with insufficient tools, mostly in the case of grouping students during practical, it is observed that one person probably the group leader will be doing the practice for others as a result of insufficient tools.

According to Olabiyi et al., in Ramos (2016), many educators are of the view that learning occurs best through participation. The use of training facilities helps teachers to direct the learning of their students instead of talking from a higher platform to passive students, some of who might be asleep. Students, are known to learn by discovery and the teacher cannot have in stock all that the child needs to know. The psychological relevance of individualized instruction also necessitates the use of various approaches to cover the different abilities and perceptions of students. Nothing else can help to achieve better diversification of lessons in the classroom than educationally certified training facilities and techniques. Preparing for the world of work is a major driver of vocational and technical education. Al-Momani and Al- Balqa (2012) stated that it has always been the main priority of vocational and technical education to introduce students to the world of work at the prevocational education level and this is achieved by exposing them to lifelong skills in their chosen careers. A world of work means to be engaged in a profession or occupation which guarantees regular income, satisfaction and the opportunity to improve on current skill sets. Graduates of vocational and technical education need to be guaranteed job opportunities and the security that it offers.

The purpose of Work-Based Learning according to Keavy and Chakron (2015) is to provide career awareness, career exploration opportunities, career planning activities and help students attain competencies such as positive work attitudes and other employable skills, develop interdisciplinary learning experiences for problem-solving, critical-thinking and communication skills for learners to link their classroom learning with the challenges they will face in the workplace of the future, provide a win-win situation where the learners needs and the industry requirements for skilled and talented employees are both met, create a key driver that gives the needs for active policies to secure learning that meets the need of the workplace, and turn entry-level work experiences into career opportunities.

There has been a lot of concern that after graduation, many graduates still roam the streets without necessary knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that will make them readily employable in the world of work (Okebukola, 2006 & Yahaya 2007). Innocent, Joseph and Vin- Mbah (2015) observed that despite the involvement of students in some work experiences, many students cannot display requisite skills in their fields of study which implies that there is a mismatch between tertiary institutions outputs and labour market demands. This must be checked to bridge the variety of gaps involving classroom learning experiences and practical skills acquisition needed by students that will enable them to be gainfully employed or self-employed.

Therefore, input from employers is as critical to preparing work-based learning programmes and course curricula, as input from any group of experts is needed to shape state and local curricula (Tennessee Department of Education, 2016). Having a variety of industries offering work-based learning experiences will enable teachers to guide students and speak to employers to ensure that students have access to the opportunities that will build a broad range of skills, which would improve their academic performance.

Research questions:

1. What is the perceived influence of Work-Based Learning on students' employment prospects?

Hypothesis

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the mean perception of the students on the influence of Work-Based Learning on students' employment prospects of OTM students based on gender.



Method

The study adopted explanatory mixed-method research design. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. The qualitative aspect was used to support the quantitative aspect. This design helped the researcher to triangulate the data gathered in the course of data analysis. The researcher was able to confirm and explain the information from the two methods. Quantitative data were gathered by employing a structured questionnaire while the qualitative data were gathered through focus group discussion. The population of the study consisted of 81 HND Office Technology and Management Students from Plateau State Polytechnic, Barkin Ladi. The researcher believed that HND students were in a better position to understand and appreciate the work-based performance indices because of their exposure to three months and one-year Students Industrial Work Experience (SIWES) before their admission into the higher programme in a tertiary institution. There was no sampling as the population was manageable and accessible.

A structured questionnaire tagged 'Work-Based Learning Questionnaire' (WBLQ) designed by the Researcher with a split-half reliability coefficient of 0.89 was used to gather data for the study. The questionnaire consisted of 15 carefully designed items after an extensive review of the literature. The items were structured on a 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agreed (SA) SA = 4, Agreed (A) = 3, Disagreed (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagreed (SD) = 1. A total of 81 copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents while 76 were retrieved representing 96.2% return rate.

The instrument for gathering the qualitative data was focus group discussion. The focus group discussion guide was designed by the researcher and is made up of two open-ended questions. The questions were meant to solicit responses of the participants on the influence of work-based learning on students' employment prospects. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, voluntary participation and confidentiality were considered. Data from the focus group discussion were audiotaped with the permission of the participants. The discussion lasted for two hours. The quantitative data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation for the research question while the qualitative data were analysed using content analysis to determine the relevant themes.

Results

Research Question: What is the perceived influence of Work-Based Learning on students' employment prospects?



Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the responses on the perceived influence of Work-Based Learning on students' employment prospects

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Work-Based Learning (WBL) promotes employers' involvement in the education process and prepares students for future employment	3.40	0.70	Agree
2.	Work-Based Learning enables students to be exposed to job opportunities	3.35	0.57	Agree
3.	WBL makes industries provide job opportunities for outstanding students after the internship programme	3.13	0.76	Agree
4.	Work-based learning promotes employers' involvement in the education process and prepares students for employment	3.40	0.69	Agree
5.	Work-based learning allows students to learn work terminology and industry protocols for employment prospects	3.42	0.64	Agree
6.	WBL helps students understand workplace expectations for employment prospects	3.43	0.66	Agree
7.	Work-based learning provides students with workplace skills using a learning-by-doing method for employment prospects	3.49	0.62	Agree
8.	WBL provides students with the opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge for employment.	3.73	0.51	Strongly Agree
9.	Work-based learning connects the classroom and the world of work.	3.62	0.58	Strongly Agree
10.	Work-bases learning encourages students in career development	3.49	0.57	Agree
11.	Work-based learning can offer added value learning opportunities which may be particularly appropriate for employment.	3.30	0.61	Agree
12.	Work-based learning helps students understand problem-solving skills for employment prospects	1.57	1.63	Disagree
13.	Work-based learning provides a productive future workforce to the industries.	3.32	0.66	Agree
14.	Work-based learning offers students a curriculum that will provide employment prospects	3.64	0.54	Agree
15.	Work-based learning enables students to acquire necessary skills for employment	3.34	0.69	Agree
Weighted Mean		3.31	0.70	Agree

Analysis of data in Table 1 shows mean and standard deviation of responses on the perceived influence of Work-Based Learning on students' employment prospects. The Table reveals that the respondents agreed that Work-Based Learning (WBL) promotes employers' involvement in the education process and prepares students for future employment (mean = 3.40). Respondents also agreed that WBL exposes students to job opportunities (mean = 3.35), same way the respondents indicate that WBL makes industries provide job opportunities for outstanding students after the



internship programme, Work-based learning promotes employers' involvement in the education process and prepares students for employment, Work-based learning allows students to learn work terminology and industry protocols for employment prospects, Work-based learning enables students to acquire necessary skills for employment. These were supported by mean scores of 3.13, 3.42, 3.43 and 3.49 respectively.

In addition, the respondents agreed that work-based learning provides students with the opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge for employment and Work-based learning connects the classroom and the world of work, same way Work-based learning is appropriate, it should be included in a programme of study to enable students to achieve specific work-related learning outcomes and Work-based learning outcomes must be linked to appropriate occupational competencies. These are supported by mean scores of 3.30, 3.30, 3.32, 3.64 and 3.34. The respondents also strongly agreed that work-based learning provides students with opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge in real work situations as it bridged the gap between higher education and actual practice (3.13). The respondents also agreed that Work-based learning connects the classroom, worksite and world of work. The respondents disagreed that Work-based learning guarantees employment prospects for students (mean = 1.57).

Ho1: There is no significant difference in the mean perception of the students on the influence of Work-Based Learning on students' employment prospects based on gender.

Table 2: Summary of Independent samples t-test of the difference between the mean perception of male and female students on the influence of Work-Based Learning on students' employment prospects

Group	N	Mean	SD	t-cal	Df	p-value	Decision
Male	29	3.01	0.52	1.527	204	0.128	H ₀₁ Not Rejected
Female	52	3.12	0.47				

Source: Field survey, 2021

P>0.05

The data in Table 2 reveal that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students on the perceived influence of work-based learning on employment prospects of students ($t_{204} = 1.527$, $P > 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female students on the perceived influence of work-based learning on employment prospects of students were not rejected. This implied that male and female students do not differ in their responses regarding the influence of work-based learning on employment prospects.

The result of the qualitative aspect of this study reveals two different themes.

Theme 1: Strengthening of skills

Twenty-two participants representing (27.2%) indicated that work-based learning help to strengthen teamwork skills which will make them easily employable.

Theme 2: Firsthand involvement in a specific occupation.

Twenty-one participants representing (26.1) indicated that work-based learning connects workplace experiences to classroom subject matter through an occupational theme.

Discussion of Findings



The study was conducted to determine the perceived influence of Work-Based Learning on students' employment prospects. The study found that Work-based learning has a positive effect on students' employment prospects because it provided students with an opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge in real work situations. This means that with the deployment of work-based learning, students have the opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge to a real work situation. This finding supports the earlier finding of Ukwueze, (2011), who held that work-based learning has a positive impact on students' career success. Chukwuedo (2011), opined that Work-based Learning enhances the competency of students in the workshop/laboratory, improves students' classroom learning creates employment opportunities. It was also agreed that Work-based learning was appropriate, and should be included in a programme of study to enable students achieve specific work-related learning outcomes. This indicates that work-based learning should be used for study as it is important in work-related learning. This finding supports the earlier finding of Smith and Comyn (2013) confirming the importance of the workplace as a site for learning and developing employability skills. The development of employability skills plays an important part in human resource management and training plans.

The study also revealed that Work-Based Learning promote employers' involvement in the education process and prepares students for future employment. This means that for successful employment prospects, work-based learning prepares students for future employment. This finding is in line with Keavy and Chakron (2015) that it provides career awareness, career exploration opportunities and career planning activities and helps students attain competencies such as positive work attitudes and other employable skills, develop interdisciplinary learning experiences for problem-solving, critical-thinking and communication skills for learners to link their classroom learning with the challenges they will face in the workplace of the future. The study found that there was no significant difference in the responses of students on the perceived influence of Work-Based Learning on students' employment prospects based on their gender. The findings showed that students agreed regardless of their gender that the influence of Work-Based Learning on students' employment prospects is critical. All the participants indicated that the perceived influence of Work-Based Learning is needed for students' employment and career development. The finding is in line with Raimi (2015) who reported that female students are equal, similar and desirous as their male counterparts in employment prospects regarding the use of work-based learning for employment.

Conclusion

This study adds to the body of evidence suggesting that undergraduate work experience, particularly the Work-based Learning programme, has a beneficial impact on a student's career performance. Work-Based Learning is a model of a school-industry partnership which exposes and prepares students for the industry, working methodologies and practical learning exposure with machines and equipment that may not be available at school. Based on this, it is concluded that Work-based Learning is critical to students' learning of the skills and competencies they need to do well in school and in their fields of occupation after school.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

1. There should be a collaboration between the school and industries for curriculum creation and implementation, so that what is taught in school is needed in the industries.
2. Students research projects must be based on solving particular industry problems as identified during the period of training.



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