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EMPLOYERS' PERCEPTION OF COVENANT UNIVERSITY GRADUATES

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ABSTRACT

Executive Summary

According to Nicholas Negroponte, “No matter what global problem you are dreading, whether it’s the elimination of poverty, whether it’s the creation of peace, whether its solving environmental energy problems, the solution- whatever it is- multiple solutions, the solutions always include education.” The quality of education almost always determines the quality of productivity and development worldwide. These profound statements succinctly capture the essence and significance of this study. Having been in operation for over twelve years now, it is appropriate at this time to evaluate Employers’ perception of Covenant University [CU] graduates. This exercise is apt to inform CU management what to strengthen or change for overall improvement of its education delivery services. Such exercise is a norm in virtually all in institutions operating Total Quality Management [TQM] systems worldwide. It is against this background this study was undertaken.

The problems that prompted this study were firstly, Employers’ dissatisfaction with the quality of graduates produced by Nigerian Universities. Many present day graduates were described as half-baked; and secondly, Covenant Universities’ concern about the performance of their graduates, which is an indication of the fulfillment of the institutions’ vision and mission statements.

Consequently, the objectives of this study were to: ascertain the work skills and traits highly rated by Employers as necessary for job effectiveness; know the extent to which Covenant University [CU] graduates meet Employers’ expectations in terms of job effectiveness; find out the outstanding traits observed in CU graduates in the workplace; find out the disappointing traits observed in CU graduates in the workplace; find out the areas that CU graduates require re-training; know the institutions that produced the best performing students in the workplace in the past 4 years?; ascertain Employers’ willingness to accept CU students for SIWES programme; ascertain Employers’ willingness to employ CU graduates; ascertain Employers’ willingness to assist in equipping CU undergraduates with professional skills required in the workplace and to collate Employers’ suggestions for Covenant University management in terms of preparing students for the world of work?

The research design for this study was survey, using questionnaire and interview guidelines as data collection instruments. The population for this study was all the Graduates of Covenant University from 2006 to date and their respective Employers. Approximately, they are about 7000 graduates. A target sample of 1000 Covenant University Graduates and their respective Employers were attempted. After several months’ effort to reach the Graduates and their Employers, the research team was eventually able to reach thirty nine [39] Graduates and their Employers. This partly accounted for the ‘Pilot Study Report’ tag given to this document.

Data collected was analysed with simple descriptive statistics of frequency count and percentages.

The core findings made in this pilot study are as follows:

Finding 1: The four [4] highest rated work skills/attributes, that were rated by Employers as ‘very important’ were: Communicative skill; Problem Solving skill; Basic Knowledge of Core concepts in the field of work and Conforming with Work Ethics.

Finding 2: Very few of the sampled Employers responded to the question on ‘extent to which CU Graduates met Employers’ Expectations’. The overriding judgment of the few Employers who responded was that Covenant University graduates met their expectation only moderately or averagely.

Finding 3: Again, only few of the sampled Employers responded to the questions of outstanding and disappointing traits observed in CU graduates. From the few Employers who responded, Isolation [hardly engaging in social interaction] featured as the most prominent disappointing trait, followed by lack of professionalism, lateness, Nonchalant attitude and inability to meet timelines . The most outstanding features of CU graduates reported were: dedication to duty, commitment and consistency.

Finding 4: Two key areas where CU graduates needed to be upgraded or re-trained, as reported by the sampled Employers, were: teamwork and leadership skills.

Finding 5: University of Lagos received the highest first rating as the institution that has produced the best performing students in the past 4 years, followed by Covenant University and University of Ibadan in that order.

Finding 6: Majority of the Employers sampled [69%] were willing to accept CU students for SIWES programme but none of them signified in categorical terms their willingness to employ them.

Finding 7: Majority of the sampled Employers [72%] expressed willingness to assist in equipping CU undergraduates with professional skills required in the workplace.

Finding 8: The most prominent suggestion was ‘continuity’. The Employers interviewed strongly recommended that Covenant University should endeavour to maintain its standard. Other recommendations were: CU should intensify on training and capacity building of its staff; Relate teaching to solve real life issues and inculcate in the students team work skills.

Bearing in mind the sample size of this pilot study and the limitations of this study, it should be reiterated that some degree of caution need be applied when interpreting these findings. Consequently, all the inferences, interpretations and extrapolations made here are speculative. There is clearly a need for more longitudinal study to reach more Employers to allow for more reliable and valid generalization

The findings were discussed in the light of current literatures while the following are recommended:

- A pragmatic review of the current programme curriculum and course compacts should be made in collaboration with world class Industries and Employers of labour with the aim of deleting redundant courses and programmes and injecting more industry and society relevant programmes;
- The strategy of inculcating the university core values, which are clearly needed in the world of work, as confirmed by this pilot study, should be reviewed to engender a significantly better result. On no account

should Employers be finding CU graduates isolates, lacking professionalism, coming late to work, closing early or not working assiduously during work hours, exhibiting Nonchalant attitude to work and hardly meeting timelines.

- There is need to make this study statutory and longitudinal to allow for a more pragmatic development of a model of tracking CU graduate, their Employers and their Performance in the world of work. This continuous feedback is imperative for the University's continuous development.

KEYWORDS: Employers, Perception, Graduates, Employability skills, Covenant University

INTRODUCTION

Covenant University was established in October 2002 with the mandate to raise a new generation of leaders. In order to do this, Covenant University's departure philosophy of departing from knowledge to empowerment and points to facts has played a major role. Covenant University has stood out in 13 short years as the best private University in Nigeria and has gained competitive advantage which has put it as the Second Best University in Nigeria. While the aim of the university has gone beyond Nigeria and Africa, it is currently driving towards becoming one of the best ten universities in the world within ten years tagged "one of ten in ten."

One of the steps towards achieving this goal of "one of ten in ten" is to collect, analyze and interpret information on employers perception of the graduates of Covenant University within their employment. This is aimed at evaluating the real life application of the plethora of soft skills and the technical skills the students have been taught in school. The present evaluation of employers perception of Covenant University graduates is important owing to the fact that organizations around the world have reported that they are more in need of "industry-relevant competencies" (Jackson, 2009). Hence, the needs to examine the knowledge we have imparted in our students against the expected skills from the employers of our graduates.

The present study is in line with what obtains in world class universities. It is well documented that other world class universities like Harvard, Yale and Princeton know where their graduates go to after graduation. For instance, majority of Harvard graduates tend to go into consulting and finance with 22%, 22%, 21%, 28%, 27%, 25%, 25% , 23% and 24% reportedly going into consulting each year from 2006 to 2014 respectively while 41%, 45%, 45%, 32%, 34.5, 39%, 35%, 26.5, 32 went into finance the same period (Harvard Business School Employment Statistics, n.d.).

Interestingly, in 2010, it was reported that Harvard, Stanford and Yale graduates were represented most among members of the United States congress (Morella, 2010). However, data is yet to be available on how students from universities in Nigeria, especially private universities are generally faring in the world of work. This study is an attempt to close this gap for Covenant University by collecting, analyzing and presenting empirical data on employers perception of Covenant University graduates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The success of any institution is measured by the contributions of her graduates wherever they are privileged to serve either as employees or employer of labour (self employed). Organisations, industries and the society at large assess the contribution(s) of an individual graduate and give necessary feedback on how well such an individual is faring in relations to the demand of employment. Graduate employment generally reflects the relationship between the university

and the outside world or town and gown ([Boden & Nadeva, 2010](#)) hence; universities tend to expect feedback from employers on how their graduates are performing after graduation.

In Nigeria, graduates are generally gainfully employed in either of the following areas: “(a) the public sector, including government ministries, schools, and parastatals; (b) the private sector, which encompasses small to medium-sized private business as well as multinational corporations; and (c) self employment” (Dabalen, Oni & Adekola, p.15). Irrespective of the sector or area of employment, there is increasing need for the employee to meet up with their own side of the psychological contract of employability.

Universities world over are increasingly interested in assessing the employability of their graduates and employers assessment of same. According to Alibaygi, Barani, Karamidehkordi and Pouya (2013, p. 674), “employability is defined as the perceived ability of conquering sustainable employment appropriate to one’s qualification(s).” Studies have been carried out in universities and in different countries to assess the employability of graduates. For instance, in countries like South Africa ([Bruwer, 1998](#)), Australia ([Jackson & Chapman, 2012](#)), Iran ([Alibaygi et al, 2013](#)), Pakistan (Mirza, Jaffri, & Hashmi, 2014), the United Kingdom (Tomlinson, 2008), North America (Casner - [Lotto & Barrington, 2006](#)) and so forth, universities have carried out studies to examine the employability of their graduates.

Universities quest to assess employability is not only curriculum adjustment and development driven but is also hinged on the fact that employers of labour are increasingly looking out for “employability skills” and when there is an observed lack of employability skill in graduates who have been employed; it tends to cause higher training cost to both government and private sector employers (Dabalen, *et al*, 2000; [Zakaria, Yatim, & Ismail, 2014](#)). This disparity was highlighted by Dabalen *et al* (2000, p. 21) who noted that, “a large mismatch appears to exist between university output and labor market demand” and this has made some scholars point out that employers are beginning to wonder if graduates are “really ready to work” and if they are, how are they able to apply the basic knowledge or skill learnt in the university in the work environment? ([Casner - Lotto & Barrington, 2006](#), p. 1).

Studies have found gaps in the possession of non-technical skills as major challenge in employability of graduates (Jackson, 2013). As have been noted earlier, “serious disconnect exists between university training and the needs of the labor market” (Dabalen, *et al*, 2000, p. 24). Interestingly, Covenant University has from the outset entrenched into her curriculum the development of non-technical skills to augment the technical skill skills acquired by the students by teaching custom made courses like the Total Man Concept (TMC) and Entrepreneurial Development Studies (EDS) and recently, the Towards a Total Graduate (TTG), Certificate in Leadership Development (CLD) and Diploma in Leadership Development (DLD). The skills and knowledge obtained from these custom-built courses are aimed at adding value to the credentials of Covenant University graduates as the half-life of university degrees world over tend to be on the decrease. This decrease was highlighted by Tomlinson (2008) who reported that students in the United Kingdom have asserted that, “the degree is not enough” to succeed in the employment market. However, some of the questions that answers are being sought for by university proprietors are: how are our graduates assessed by employers? What is the perspective of the employers in our student’s employability?

It has been reported that undergraduate work placements of students enhance future workplace adjustment and integration (Crebert, Bates, Bell, Carol-Joy, & Cragnolini, 2007). This reflects one of the core aspects of Covenant University educational philosophies, that is, to expose students to the world of work through the student work-study programme. Also, students exposed to career management skills and internship as is done in Covenant University have

been found to be employed in lesser time than their contemporaries ([Taylor & Hooley, 2014](#)). However, empirical data is yet to exist to capture how these extra inputs in training Covenant University students are being reflected in the employment sector from the perspective of the employers.

Incidentally, it seems that Universities are on the one hand busy graduating students while employers are on the other hand expecting different skills from what universities are providing their graduates with. One of the major points of debate is the fact that the required competencies for employability of graduates seems to be differently perceived by the students and employers to the extent that different levels of students tend to see what is needed to be employable differently (Tyman, 2013). This disparity in anticipation of needed skills was pointed out by Jackson and Chapman (2012), who recently noted that a disparity has been observed in Australia between what managers and supervisors rate as non-technical skills needed and what business academics rated. In order to reduce this disparity, more collaboration between 'town and gown' is needed so that the producers of graduates and the employers of graduates are in tandem with their needs.

The quest of the Covenant University management in becoming one of the best ten universities in the next ten years will be realized when they have access or get feedback from the larger society as to the performance of their graduates. Covenant University is a Christian private institution located in the western part of Nigeria. By the name Covenant, the proprietor believed that the school is in covenant with God, Parents, and also the students to deliver only the best in all ramifications (academically, morally, spiritually etc.) and to raise the students as a new generation of leaders. Assessment is highly relevant in other to ascertain that the mission of raising a new generation of leaders is achieved after graduation and it could be accessed through employers' assessment of our graduates in relations with graduates from other institutions, that is, without assessment and probably without comparison of graduates from different institution the success of an institution will not be measured or appreciated.

To situate graduates learning, skills and overall achievement there is need to engage in a variety of institutional assessments. Assessment is the process of gathering information using various methods to systematically gauge the effectiveness of the institution and academic programs to document student learning, knowledge, behaviours, and skills as a result of their collegiate experiences. Apart from feedback from employers as regard the university graduates, assessment will inform programme development, instruction, and subsequently enhance student learning.

In order to tap the skills needed by graduates to be gainfully employed, Zakaria, Yatim, and [Ismail \(2014\)](#) developed a 12 item instrument measuring the following clusters of abilities: "communication skill, professional ethics and morality, entrepreneurial skill, critical thinking in problem solving and personal quality" (p. 1202). However, in a more detailed study, Mirza, Jaffri, and Hashmi, (2014) reported a skill gap or disparity between Pakistani employers needs and graduate students possession in the following areas: "Communication and business specific skills which includes: verbal communication, Communication in mother tongue, Customer service skills, Reading skills, Interpretational skills, Entrepreneurship skills, Ability to interpret business problems and develop appropriate solutions, Ability to plan and organize; Core employability skills which includes: team work, Hard work, Self –discipline, Effective, Devoted, Productive, Self-motivated and Initiating. Professional skills which includes: Accuracy, Decision making skills, Ability to apply knowledge of the subject, Ability to use modern tools, equipment and technologies, specific to job, Honest, Persistent, Technical skills related to subject and Efficiency" (p. 17). These skill set reflects what employers in these climes tend to expect from employees. However, for Nigeria, employers are yet to come up with a blueprint of what they really

want in graduates.

Interestingly, scholars have called for the measurability of these skills noting that, “graduate level of employability skills should be evaluated before entering work market” (Zakaria *et al.*, 2014, p. 1202). Covenant University has over a more than a decade entrenched these skills in her graduates but there is need to examine if what has been imparted into the students are in consonance with what is required by the employment sector hence this study which is aimed at assessing Covenant University graduates from employers point of view.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The problems that prompted this study were:

- Employers’ dissatisfaction with the quality of graduates produced by Nigerian Universities. Many present day graduates were described as *half-baked*.
- Covenant Universities’ concern about the performance of their graduates, which is an indication of the performance of the institutions in terms of their vision or mission statements

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVE

General Objective

The general objective of this study is: “to gather information from Employers regarding their assessment of the job performance of Covenant University graduates in their organizations, and to gain insight into employers’ expectation of graduates work skills”.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are to:

- Ascertain the work skills and traits highly rated by Employers as necessary for job effectiveness
- Know the extent to which Covenant University [CU] graduates meet Employers’ expectations in terms of job effectiveness
- Find out the outstanding traits observed in CU graduates in the workplace
- Find out the disappointing traits observed in CU graduates in the workplace
- Find out the areas that CU graduates require re-training
- Know the institutions that produced the best performing students in the workplace in the past 4 years
- Ascertain Employers’ willingness to accept CU students for SIWES programme
- Ascertain Employers’ willingness to employ CU graduates
- Ascertain Employers’ willingness to assist in equipping CU undergraduates with professional skills required in the workplace
- Collate Employers’ suggestions for Covenant University management in terms of preparing students for the world of work

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the work skills and traits highly rated by Employers as necessary for job effectiveness?
- To what extent do Covenant University [CU] graduates meet Employers' expectations in terms of job effectiveness?
- What are the outstanding traits observed in CU graduates in the workplace?
- What are the disappointing traits observed in CU graduates in the workplace?
- In what areas do CU graduates require re-training?
- Which institution produced the best performing students in the workplace in the past 4 years?
- What is the degree of Employers' willingness to accept CU students for SIWES programme?
- What is the degree of Employers' willingness to employ CU graduates?
- What is the degree of Employers' willingness to assist in equipping CU undergraduates with professional skills required in the workplace?
- What are Employers' suggestions for Covenant University management?

METHODOLOGY

- **Research Design**

Survey design, using questionnaire and interview guidelines, was adopted for this study – being predominantly an opinion poll study.

- **Population**

The populations for this study were all the Graduates of Covenant University from 2006 to date and their respective Employers. Approximately, they are about 7000 graduates.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A target sample of 1000 Covenant University Graduates and their respective Employers were attempted. After several futile efforts to reach the Graduates and their Employers, spanning several months, the research team was eventually able to reach thirty nine [39] Employers. The challenges experienced with getting adequate sample for this study is presented under the limitation of study. This is partly what informs the tagging of this document as a *pilot study report*. Due to the nature of the study, the sampling technique was purposive. Details of the Employers are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: List of Employers Who Participated in This Study

| S/N | Name of Organisation | Location |
|-----|-------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Skye Bank, | Victoria Island |
| 2 | Exusia Nigeria Limited | Lagos Island |
| 3 | Priority Communications | Lagos Island |
| 4 | ALFREN PLC Island | Lagos Island |

| | | |
|----|-------------------------------|---|
| 5 | Samsung electronics | Electronics |
| 6 | Smile communication | Ikeja |
| 7 | Standard Chartered Bank | Ikoyi |
| 8 | Wild fusion Digital Agency | Ikoyi |
| 9 | RIC properties | Tinubu way, Island |
| 10 | First Capital trust PLC | Adeyemo, Victoria Island, Lagos |
| 11 | Sahara Powers | Ikoyi, Lagos |
| 12 | Fleet Technology | Victoria Island, Lagos |
| 13 | Unified payment services | Victoria Island, Lagos |
| 14 | HGE capital oil | Lagos |
| 15 | Mansard Insurance | Lekki |
| 16 | Price Water Cooperation (PWC) | Muri Okunola, V.I |
| 17 | Covenant University | Department of Accounting |
| 18 | Covenant University | Department of Sociology |
| 19 | Covenant University | Department of Psychology |
| 20 | Covenant University | Department of Microbiology |
| 21 | Covenant University | Establishment-HRD |
| 22 | Covenant University | Department of Biochemistry |
| 23 | Covenant University | College of Leadership and Development Studies |

Source: Field work conducted in Lagos and Ogun States in 2014

Note: The N value is justified by the fact that some institutions like Covenant University have many distinct departments whose staff are CU graduates. Each of such departments represents an Employer.

INSTRUMENTS

The instrument used for data collection was '*Questionnaire on Employers' Perception of Covenant University Graduates*'. Major sections in the instrument include: Employer's Work Skill Expectations for Staff; The Extent CU Graduates have met Organization expectations; Five Universities that produced the best performing staff over the years in the establishment; Outstanding features of CU Graduates as observed by Employers; Disappointing traits observed in CU Graduates; Areas CU Graduates had to be retrained; Willingness to collaborate with CU to equip undergraduates with professional needed for the world of work; Willingness to accept CU students for SIWES; Willingness to employ CU graduates; Remarkable Achievement by CU Graduates; and Suggestions/Recommendation. Copy of the questionnaire is under Appendix 1. Essentially, the *content validity* of the instrument was ascertained expert scrutiny and moderation.

PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION

After obtaining formal permission from the Registrar, the Researchers visited CU registry to obtain contact details for all graduates since 2006. Thereafter some CU Graduates were contacted via telephone calls with the aim of obtaining their Employers' contact details. Furthermore, the CU Alumni Office was visited to obtain data on Graduates' current employment status and Employers' details. Many of the contact details obtained from the CU registry and Alumni office were links to Parents of CU Graduates who promised to get in touch with their children and revert. However, many of these promises were never fulfilled. It was during the Alumni annual meeting which coincided with the period of data collection for this study that more Employers' contact details could be obtained. The effort to reach Graduates' Employers

took over 6 months.

Thereafter, two research assistants were hired, trained and sent to interview the identified Employers within Lagos and Ogun State. Heads of departments and Units where CU Gradates were working within the CU campus were also interviewed. The chunk of data used in this study was obtained via this effort.

DATA ANALYSIS

Simple descriptive statistics of frequency count and percentages were used to analyze data collected for this study. The results of the analyses are presented below.

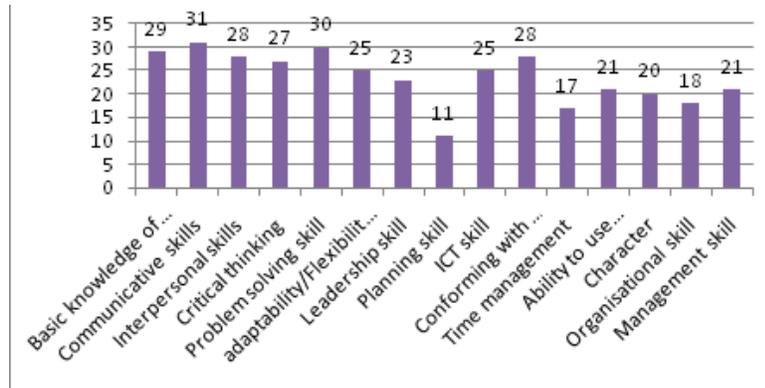
RESULTS

Table 2: Degree of Importance Employers Attached to Suggested Work Skills

| S/N | Organizational Work Skill Expectations | Degree of Importance Employers Attached to Suggested Work Skills [N = 39] | | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|----|-----------|----|------------------|----|---------------|---|
| | | Very Important | % | Important | % | Fairly Important | % | Not Important | % |
| 1 | Basic knowledge of core concepts in the field | 29 | 74 | 10 | 26 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | Communicative skills | 31 | 79 | 7 | 18 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| 3 | Interpersonal skills | 28 | 72 | 9 | 23 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| 4 | Critical thinking | 27 | 69 | 11 | 28 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| 5 | Problem solving skill | 30 | 77 | 8 | 21 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| 6 | adaptability/Flexibility skill | 25 | 64 | 11 | 28 | 3 | 8 | 0 | 0 |
| 7 | Leadership skill | 23 | 59 | 13 | 33 | 3 | 8 | 0 | 0 |
| 8 | Planning skill | 11 | 28 | 23 | 59 | 5 | 13 | 0 | 0 |
| 9 | ICT skill | 25 | 64 | 12 | 31 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| 10 | Conforming with Work ethics | 28 | 72 | 9 | 23 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| 11 | Time management | 17 | 44 | 20 | 51 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| 12 | Ability to use relevant equipment | 21 | 54 | 14 | 36 | 4 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| 13 | Character | 20 | 51 | 17 | 44 | 2 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| 14 | Organisational skill | 18 | 46 | 17 | 44 | 4 | 10 | 0 | 0 |
| 15 | Management skill | 21 | 54 | 15 | 38 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Source: Field work conducted in Lagos and Ogun States in 2014

Note: The N value is justified by the fact that some institutions like Covenant University have many distinct departments whose staff are CU graduates. Each of such departments represents an Employer.

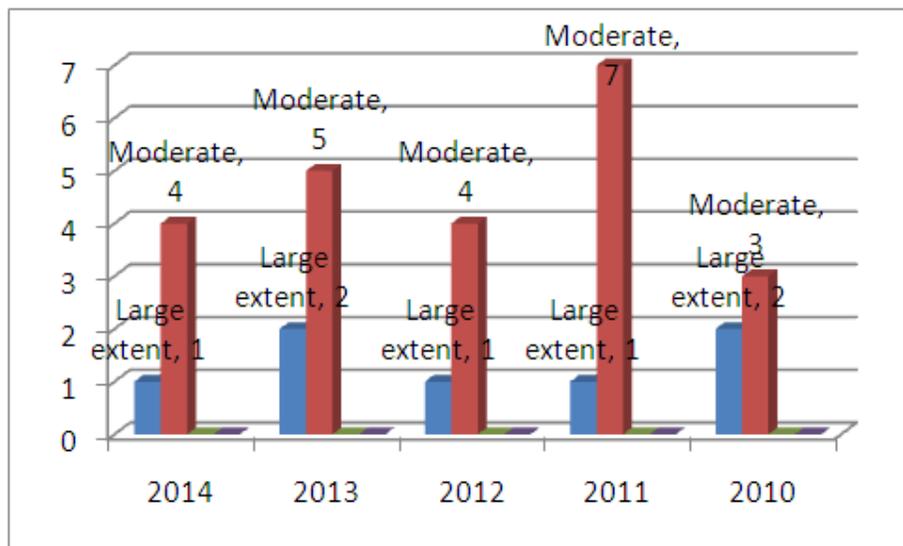


Out of the fifteen [15] work skills listed, the sampled Employers consistently rated twelve [12] skills more ‘very important’ more often than the remaining three [3] skills that were rated as ‘important’. None of the works skills were rated as ‘not important’. No new work skill was suggested by the sampled Employers. The four [4] highest rated work skills/attributes, that were rated by Employers as ‘very important’ were: *Communicative skill* [1st; 79%]; *Problem Solving skill* [2nd; 77%]; *Basic Knowledge of Core concepts in the field of work* [3rd; 74%] and *Conforming with Work Ethics* [4th; 72%].

Table 3: Extent to Which Cu Graduates Met Employers’ Expectations

| Year | To What Extent Does CU Graduates Meet Employer's Expectation? | | | | | | | |
|------|---|---|----------|----|--------|---|------------|---|
| | Large extent | % | Moderate | % | Barely | % | Not at all | % |
| 2014 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2013 | 2 | 5 | 5 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2012 | 1 | 3 | 4 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2011 | 1 | 3 | 7 | 18 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2010 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 8 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Source: Field work conducted in Lagos and Ogun States in 2014

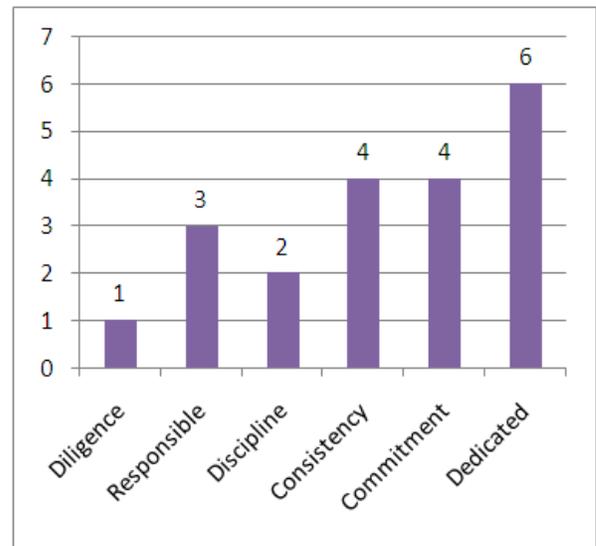
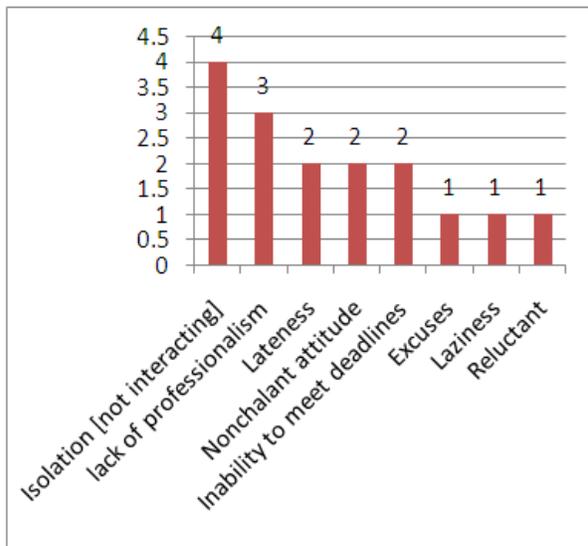


Very few of the sampled Employers responded to the question on ‘*extent to which VU Graduates met Employers’ Expectations*’. The highest response rate was seven [7] or 18% for 2011. The overriding judgment of the few Employers who responded was that Covenant University graduates met their expectation only *moderately* or averagely. A fewer proportion [Max = 5% or 2] of the sampled employers reported that the CU graduates they have employed largely met their expectation. None of the Employers sampled reported that CU graduates did not meet their expectation.

Table 4: Outstanding and Disappointing Traits Observed in CU Graduates

| Disappointing Traits | F | % | Outstanding Features of Cu Graduates [N = 39] | | |
|-----------------------------|---|----|---|---|----|
| | | | | f | % |
| Isolation [not interacting] | 4 | 10 | | | |
| lack of professionalism | 3 | 8 | Diligence | 1 | 3 |
| Lateness | 2 | 5 | Responsible | 3 | 8 |
| Nonchalant attitude | 2 | 5 | Discipline | 2 | 5 |
| Inability to meet deadlines | 2 | 5 | Consistency | 4 | 10 |
| Excuses | 1 | 3 | Commitment | 4 | 10 |
| Laziness | 1 | 3 | Dedicated | 6 | 15 |
| Reluctant | 1 | 3 | | | |

Source: Field work conducted in Lagos and Ogun States in 2014

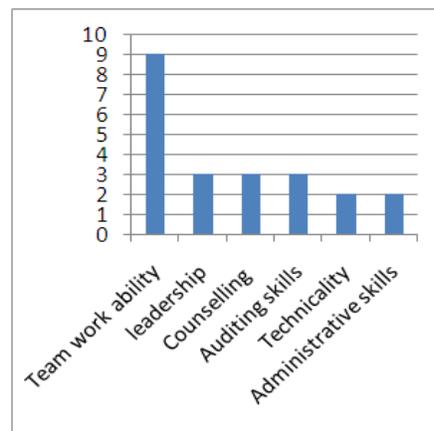


Again, only few of the sampled Employers responded to the questions of outstanding and disappointing traits observed in CU graduates – Maximum of 10% or 4 for disappointing traits and 15% or 6 for outstanding traits. From the few Employers who responded, Isolation [hardly engaging in social interaction – 10% or 4 Employers] featured as the most **prominent disappointing trait**, followed by lack of professionalism [8% or 3 Employers], lateness [5% or 2 Employers], Nonchalant attitude [5% or 2 Employers] and inability to meet deadlines [5% or 2 Employers] . The **most outstanding features** of CU graduates reported were: dedication to duty [15% or 6 Employers], Commitment [10% or 4 Employers] and Consistency [10% or 4 Employers].

Table 5: Areas where CU Graduates needed to be Upgraded or Re-trained

| In What Areas Do You Need to Upgrade Cu Graduate [N = 39] | | |
|---|---|----|
| | f | % |
| Team work ability | 9 | 23 |
| Leadership | 3 | 8 |
| Counseling | 3 | 8 |
| Auditing skills | 3 | 8 |
| Technicality | 2 | 5 |
| Administrative skills | 2 | 5 |

Source: Field work conducted in Lagos and Ogun States in 2014



The two top areas where CU graduates needed to be upgraded or re-trained, as reported by the sampled Employers, were: teamwork and leadership skill s[23% and 8% respectively; N=39]

Table 6: Universities that Have Produced Best Performing Work Force

| Five Universities That Have Produced Best Performing Students | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | 1ST | 2ND | 3RD | 4TH |
| University of Lagos | 6 | 4 | 5 | nil |
| Covenant University | 5 | 5 | 1 | 4 |
| University of Ibadan | 3 | 1 | 2 | nil |
| Olabisi Onabanjo University | 3 | nil | nil | nil |
| Obafemi Awolowo University | 2 | nil | nil | 2 |
| University of Ilorin | 1 | 3 | nil | nil |
| University of Benin | 1 | nil | 2 | nil |
| University of Nigeria Nsukka | 1 | nil | nil | nil |
| Ahmadu Bello University | nil | 3 | nil | 1 |
| UNAAD | nil | 3 | nil | nil |
| Niger Delta University | nil | 1 | nil | nil |
| Lagos State University | nil | 1 | nil | nil |
| Delta State University | nil | nil | 3 | 1 |
| Landmark University | nil | nil | nil | 1 |

Source: Field work conducted in Lagos and Ogun States in 2014

University of Lagos received the highest 1st rating as the university that has produced the best performing students in the past 4 years [from 6 Employers], followed by Covenant University [from 5 Employers], University of Ibadan [from 3 Employers] and Olabisi Onabanjo University [from 3 Employers].

Table 7: Employers' Willingness to Employ and Accept CU Students for SIWES

| Are You Willing to Accept CU Students for Siwes Prog | | | Are You Willing to Employ CU Graduates in the Future | | |
|--|----|----|--|----|----|
| | f | % | | f | % |
| NO | 9 | 23 | Not applicable | 36 | 92 |
| YES | 27 | 69 | It Depends [e.g. vacancy] | 2 | 5 |
| N/A | 2 | 5 | Clearcut 'Yes' Response | 0 | 0 |

Source: Field work conducted in Lagos and Ogun States in 2014

Majority of the Employers sampled [69%] were willing to accept CU students for SIWES programme but none of them signified in categorical terms their willingness to employ them.

Table 8: Willingness to Assist in Equipping CU Undergraduates with Professional Skills Required in the Workplace

| S/N | | f | % |
|-----|-----|----|----|
| 1 | Yes | 28 | 72 |
| 2 | No | 10 | 26 |

Source: Field work conducted in Lagos and Ogun States in 2014

Majority of the sampled Employers [72%] expressed willingness to assist in equipping CU undergraduates with professional skills required in the workplace.

Table 9: Suggestions and Recommendations from Employers

| Suggestions /Recommendations | | |
|---|---|----|
| | f | % |
| Relate teaching to solve real life issues | 2 | 5 |
| Training | 3 | 8 |
| Team work/team dynamics | 2 | 5 |
| Continuity | 6 | 15 |
| Capacity building | 3 | 8 |

Source: Field work conducted in Lagos and Ogun States in 2014

The most prominent suggestion was 'continuity' [6 Employers – 15%]. The Employers interviewed strongly recommended that Covenant University should endeavour to maintain its standard. Other recommendations were: CU should intensify on training and capacity building of its staff; Relate teaching to solve real life issues and inculcate in the students team work skills.

DISCUSSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS & CONCLUSIONS

Bearing in mind the sample size of this pilot study, some degree of caution need be applied when interpreting these findings. Consequently, all the inferences, interpretations and extrapolations made here are speculative. There is clearly a need for more longitudinal study to reach more Employers to allow for more reliable and valid generalization.

Finding 1: The four [4] highest rated work skills/attributes, that were rated by Employers as 'very important' were: *Communicative skill; Problem Solving skill; Basic Knowledge of Core concepts in the field of work and Conforming*

with *Work Ethics*.

The finding here agrees with submissions in the literature that the paramount skills needed for success in the workplace are *Communicative skill; Problem Solving skill; Basic Knowledge of Core concepts in the field of work and Conforming with Work Ethics*. For instance in the SCAN Report (2006), Employers felt that Land-Grant universities in United States had prepared graduates in basic skills required in the workplace, such as: *decision-making, problem-solving, management skills, organizational skills, leadership, etiquette, and global awareness*. Additionally, Employers felt that Land grant college graduates had good preparation in the following interpersonal skills needed in the workplace: initiative, creativity, teamwork, dedication, appearance, and being open-minded. In a related study by Raza (2011), it was found that Employers from sampled sectors of industry unanimously pointed out that they were not fully satisfied with the quality of Pakistani *university* graduates in all the four areas of development skills: *intellectual development skills, personal development skills, professional development skills, and social development skills*. This is an attestation of the veracity of this pilot study. The implication of this finding is that management needs to pay more attention to inculcating these skills in their students.

Finding 2: Very few of the sampled Employers responded to the question on ‘*extent to which CU Graduates met Employers’ Expectations*’. The overriding judgment of the few Employers who responded was that Covenant University graduates met their expectation only *moderately* or *averagely*.

The fact that only few of the sampled Employers responded to the question of whether CU graduates met their expectations and the few who responded gave an average mark to CU graduates tend to suggest that much still need to be done to equip students for the world of work. Apparently a pragmatic review and injection of some of the paramount work skills/traits listed under finding 1 above is likely to catalyze a positive improvement in this direction.

Finding 3: Again, only few of the sampled Employers responded to the questions of *outstanding* and *disappointing* traits observed in CU graduates. From the few Employers who responded, *Isolation* [hardly engaging in social interaction] featured as the most *prominent disappointing trait*, followed by *lack of professionalism*, lateness, *Nonchalant attitude* and *inability to meet timelines*. The *most outstanding features* of CU graduates reported were: *dedication to duty, commitment and consistency*.

The same explanation tendered for finding 2 above tends to apply here. There is an apparent need to conduct a pragmatic review of the curriculum in tertiary institutions to meet current demands of the world of work. Overt and covert observations of students currently on campus tend to support the claims of sampled Employers in this finding. For instance, a number of the students tend to find it difficult to work as a group. This was observed during group tutorial assignments and the last university wide leadership course group project. A number of students also tend to exhibit the habit of going late for lectures and university events with impudicity. Some hardly meet timelines. What could account for these noticeable negative traits in the Covenant University graduates sampled? Could it be their personality disposition, home training, social and emotional immaturity, general apathy towards societal cum cultural decorum? Irrespective of what is responsible, we have the responsibility of inculcating the right employability skills and ethics in the students, such that will make them tangible assets in the world of works.

Finding 4: Two key areas where CU graduates needed to be upgraded or re-trained, as reported by the sampled Employers were: *teamwork* and *leadership* skills.

This finding, coming in response to a different prompt, tends to corroborate the earlier report that CU graduates operate in isolation. This suggests that they need more training in the area *teamwork*. This naturally goes with *leadership* skills. A good leader is naturally a team player. It is therefore timely that the CU has commenced a university wide leadership development programme. This is apt to redress the negative traits attributed to CU graduates.

Finding 5: University of Lagos received the *highest first rating* as the institution that has produced the best performing students in the past 4 years, followed by Covenant University and University of Ibadan.

It is quite interesting that a fledgling private university like Covenant University could be rated as Second Best University in Nigeria coming second to University of Lagos and above University of Ibadan being among the oldest public institutions in the country. This finding suggests that Covenant University is gradually picking up in the field of human capital development in Nigeria. It is apparent that with the adoption of the recommendations from this study, CU and its graduates will become clear leaders in almost all positive human endeavours.

Finding 6: Majority of the Employers sampled [69%] were willing to accept CU students for SIWES programme but none of them signified in categorical terms their willingness to employ them.

The current economic situation in the country [Nigeria] may account for the non-categorical response of the sampled employers to the question of readiness to employ CU graduates. The fact that they are willing to accept CU students for SIWES is a confirmation of this speculation.

Finding 7: Majority of the sampled Employers [72%] expressed willingness to assist in equipping CU undergraduates with professional skills required in the workplace.

It is quite exciting to know that majority of the sampled Employers were willing to assist CU management in equipping students with requisite professional skill. This gesture is tandem with the institution policy of collaborating with relevant industries in the quest to build relevant professional skills in our students.

Finding 8: The most prominent suggestion was 'continuity'. The Employers interviewed strongly recommended that Covenant University should endeavour to maintain its standard. Other recommendations were: CU should intensify on training and capacity building of its staff; Relate teaching to solve real life issues and inculcate in the students team work skills.

These are highly relevant recommendations that should be taken seriously by management. A pragmatic adoption of these recommendations is apt to catalyze the professional development of our students whilst enhancing the realization of vision 10:2022.

LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

The major limitations to this study were time factor, paucity of functional contact details on CU Alumni, Uncooperative attitude of some CU Alumni that were contacted in refusing to link Researchers with their Employers and unwillingness of some Employers to give detailed assessment report on CU graduates in their employment. Ironically, the latter was experienced more in Covenant University where we had over one hundred [100] CU Alumni employed as staff or Faculty.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Following the findings from this study, the following are strongly recommended:

- A pragmatic review of the current programme curriculum and course compacts should be made in collaboration with world class Industries and Employers of labour with the aim of deleting redundant courses and programmes and injecting more industry and society relevant programmes.
- The strategy of inculcating the university core values, which are clearly needed in the world of work, as confirmed by this pilot study, should be reviewed to engender a significantly better result. On no account should Employers be finding CU graduates isolates, lacking professionalism, coming late to work, closing early or not working assiduously during work hours, exhibiting Nonchalant attitude to work and hardly meeting timelines.
- There is need to make this study statutory and longitudinal to allow for a more pragmatic development of a model of tracking CU graduate, their Employers and their Performance in the world of work. This continuous feedback is imperative for the University's continuous development.

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CONCLUSIONS

This study explored Employers' perception of Covenant University graduates on many parameters. It also compared CU graduates with graduates from other universities in Nigeria. The expected work skills and ethics expected by Employers were also investigated. Some of the findings suggest that Covenant University, within her short time of existence, performed well, coming only second to University of Lagos. Though this finding tend to have support with current national rating of Universities in Nigeria, yet some degree of caution may need be applied at this stage considering the limited sample size. Further longitudinal study is apt to clarify this point. These points nevertheless, the study found that there are still some areas CU management need to address to move from good performance to better and best.

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