

Chapter 11

Enhancing Employability Skills Among University Students Through Career Guidance and Counseling

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explored the role of career guidance and counseling in promoting graduates' employability skills in Tanzania higher learning institutions. A total of 123 respondents were involved. Data were collected through questionnaires, interviews, and focused group discussion. The study revealed that HLIs do not have professionals in career guidance and counseling who are solely employed to offer such services; the task is left to lecturers and wardens. Career guidance and counseling services were also found to be inadequate and not formalized thereby threatening students' acquisition of employability skills. The study recommends that higher learning institutions (HLIs) in Tanzania should see the possibilities of preparing students in various competence areas such as academic excellence, career aspects, personal and social skills. This can only be achieved by establishing comprehensive career guidance and counseling units within the institutions.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing changes in the global economy and labor market today, organizations and institutions call for employees who can work effectively and efficiently to meet the emerging workplace demands (Elder, 2014). Employers are currently motivated to recruit competent employees to flexibly take responsibilities with appropriate productivity in careers such as marketing, nursing, engineering to mention few. Most

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of the jobseekers in the world at present face unemployment challenges due to many factors including lack of employability skills (Akkermans, Schaufeli, Brenninkmeijer, & Blonk, 2013). However, even those who managed to secure jobs still experience poor work socialization, unsatisfactory employment, unfavorable working conditions and high labour burnout rates (Teichler, 2000). Steven (2007) argued that, it is not sufficient for a graduate to have knowledge of an academic subject without skills which will enhance their employment prospects. The employment skills vary across sectors; as they consistently demand for competency in communication and presentation skills; problem solving skills; critical thinking skills, social development and interaction skills; as well awareness of the external environment and its impact on the operation (Yorke, 2011). Therefore, the Tanzania's vision 2025 to become a middle income economy through industrialization will be attained through guiding the graduates to acquire and develop appropriate knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) demanded in the labor market.

Despite the movements for development of employability skills to have a long history with its roots in less uncertain economic times, a number of countries in the world still proceed handling the matter (Rovio-Johansson & Tengblad, 2007). For example in the United Kingdom (UK), Higher Learning Institutions through Students Employability Coordinating Teams (HISECT) practices help to develop employability skills and prepare students for the world of work (Elder, 2014). Within the UK institutions, the range of practices aimed to develop employability among the higher learning students are diverse and include: reflection on learning through Personal Development Planning (PDP); coaching and mentoring schemes that are available to all and to specific target groups to include international students (Yorke, 2011). In addition, universities are encouraged to partner with business and community organizations to develop programmes which would better prepare students for their professional and working lives (Rovio-Johansson & Tengblad, 2007). Fortunately some employers in UK are becoming actively engaged in providing support to institutions to ensure that students are well equipped with necessary skills that are required in the contemporary labour market.

Similar practice can also be seen in China where universities have designed programmes that enhance students' employability skills such as Graduate Gate-way Programme (GGP) that looks at teamwork, communication, career planning skills as well as interviewing and speed networking which all boost graduate confidence (O'Regan, 2010). There is also Career Information Team (CIT) that organizes 'Careers on Campus' events where students get opportunity to share what they know and acquire new information on career related matters. Additionally, the universities have joined-up working teams with key academicians who are 'Employability Champions' from within and outside the country targeting in disseminating and promoting career information and opportunities (Yorke, 2011).

In sub-Saharan Africa countries, the problem of employability skills among higher learning students is also not well addressed. There is mismatch between higher education and the job market demands outside academia (Nico, Tracy, Pillay, Bunting, & Maasen, 2011). African universities have been traditionally preparing students for public sector jobs while neglecting the needs of the private sector (Odeke, 2012). Although university degrees have been the entry requirement for various government jobs, still the skills needed for such jobs seem a problem to most graduates. It is reported that, most of them enter the job market without crucial employability skills required and lack ability to best fit into the available jobs (Waheeda, Nsa-Kaisi, & Alana, 2009).

In East Africa Region, the situation is also not well tackled. Most of the graduates lack important employability skills that lead to unemployment problem (Mbilinyi, 2012). Although universities are trying to make efforts to offer students with career information through the established career guidance and counseling programmes, still the problem exists. Taking an example of Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda,

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