

Lecturer Competence and Employability of Economics Undergraduates

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Abstract

The rate of graduate unemployment in Nigeria has escalated to alarming levels with Economics undergraduates among those affected. This research examines the role of lecturer-related factors, focusing on both content competence and delivery competence, as critical elements in enhancing employability among Economics students. Based on recent research and the current situation in Nigeria, this study suggests that the proficiency of lecturers plays a vital role in equipping students with the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to succeed in the job market. Consequently, this paper explores the significance of content competence (mastery of subject matter) and delivery competence in preparing undergraduates for employment opportunities. Lecturers' capacity to provide employability enhancing instruction may be constrained by factors such as reliance on outdated teaching methods and insufficient or limited exposure to contemporary professional practices. This study recommends improved recruitment of qualified lecturers, stronger university-industry partnerships, enhanced professional development programmes for lecturers, and a review of the Economics curriculum to integrate practical, industry-relevant content that strengthens graduate employability.

Keywords: Content Competence, Delivery Competence, Economics Undergraduate, Employability, Lecturer's Competence

Introduction

The standard of living and economic strength of a country depend on its employable and employed population. High dependency rates, common in developing countries like Nigeria, can negatively impact economic value. The severe employment crisis, marked by high unemployment and limited job opportunities, affects both the economy and individuals. To be employable, individuals must possess critical thinking, problem-solving, communication and adaptability skills, including resilience to stay relevant in the labour market, which is known as their employability (Heimler & Morote, 2019). For Nigerian undergraduates, acquiring these skills is crucial for post-graduation employment. Universities are vital in providing this knowledge and developing the labour force. If universities fall short, their graduates may struggle to find jobs. Hence, employability hinges on the relevance of graduates' skills to the labour market and the fulfilment of key internal and external factors. A major contributor to this crisis is the misalignment between the skills taught in academic institutions and the labour market requirements. Nigerian universities and polytechnics largely focus on theoretical knowledge, with less emphasis on the practical and technical skills that employers highly value in contemporary industries (Pitan, 2016; Pitan & Atiku, 2017).

Employability is the ability to move independently within the labour market to realise potential through long-term employment; it is the possession of a skill set, knowledge, understanding, and personal qualities that increase an individual's likelihood of securing and sustaining successful careers (Chang et al., 2022; Pitan & Muller, 2023). Employability skills development throughout undergraduate studies are crucial for career development, as it increases the likelihood that a student will find a suitable job following graduation (Pitan, 2016; Pitan & Atiku, 2017). As a result, the importance of employability education and skills has increased for both universities and students. Lecturer competence, which encompasses both content mastery and delivery proficiency, is a critical determinant of effective teaching and student employability readiness. Content competence refers to a lecturer's depth of subject knowledge, ability to critically engage with material, and adapt pedagogy to diverse learning needs, all of which directly influence students' academic achievement and skill acquisition (Pitan, 2016; Rubeba, 2025).

Content mastery refers to a lecturer's deep understanding and command of the subject matter they teach. It does not only involve knowledge of core theories, concepts, and current developments in the field but also the ability to organize and present this information in a logical and meaningful way. Delivery proficiency, on the other hand, is the lecturer's skill in passing knowledge effectively to students. It includes the use of appropriate teaching methods, clear explanations, engaging presentations, and the ability to adapt instruction to meet different student needs and style of learning. Therefore, content mastery and delivery proficiency are crucial for ensuring that students gain both theoretical knowledge and practical skills needed for success in their chosen careers.

To guide the analysis in this paper, the study is anchored on the Human Capital Theory, which posits that the knowledge, skills, and competencies individuals acquire through education significantly enhance their productivity and employability (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961). This paper is structured around key dimensions: Importance of employability, The role of lecturers' competence in undergraduates' employability (Content Competence and Delivery Competence), Significance of lecturers' content and delivery competence for undergraduates' employability, the Contributing factors and challenges associated with lecturers' competence in Nigerian universities, and providing the Way forward. **The aim of this paper** is to explore how the competence of lecturers in Nigerian universities shapes the employability of Economics undergraduates, identifying both strengths and gaps in current practices thereby offering insights for educational policy and curriculum development.

Importance of Employability

Employability is defined as a lifelong, university-wide process that applies to all students regardless of their academic level, program, or mode of study, encompassing a complex interplay of knowledge, skills, behaviours, attributes, and attitudes designed to foster success not only in employment but in life more broadly, while explicitly making these components clear to students to support their continuous development, yet it is not merely about preparing students for jobs, adding extra modules to curricula, compromising academic rigour, being solely the responsibility of career services, or being reducible to any single quantitative measure (Pool, 2020).

Graduate employability refers to the ability of graduates to secure and maintain employment by leveraging their skills, knowledge, and attributes to meet the demands of the labour market. It is a multifaceted concept that extends beyond mere job acquisition, encompassing the continuous development of competencies that enable individuals to adapt to evolving workplace requirements

(Römgens et al., 2019). Developing employability skills is crucial in preparing graduates for the workforce, enhancing their productivity and competitiveness in the job market.

Employers worldwide emphasise the importance of technical, communication, leadership, and interpersonal skills, as well as self-development, employability, and adaptability (Taiga et al., 2019). Research has shown that employability skills are critical in addressing unemployment challenges, particularly among youth (Afolabi & Ogunjimi, 2021). The dimensions of employability in universities include Disciplinary Knowledge and Mastery (Developing discipline-specific knowledge and its application in the workforce). Transferable Generic Skills (The acquisition of skills such as information literacy, communication, teamwork, and problem-solving that are transferable across contexts). Emotional Regulation and Intelligence (The development of emotional intelligence and the ability to regulate and manage emotions in the workplace). Career Development Skills (Developing career planning, job search strategies, and professional networking skills). Self-Management (Developing skills such as self-evaluation, reflection, and continuous learning). Self-Efficacy (The development of self-confidence, self-esteem, and a growth mindset).

Despite the importance of these dimensions, several factors hinder graduate employability, particularly in developing economies like Nigeria. Graduate employability is a critical determinant of individual and national prosperity, particularly in economies grappling with high unemployment rates. It encompasses a broad range of skills and attributes that enable graduates to navigate the complexities of the modern labour market. However, achieving high levels of employability requires addressing systemic challenges such as curriculum misalignment, inadequate practical training, and limited industry engagement. By prioritising these issues and fostering collaboration between educational institutions and employers, Nigeria can enhance the employability of its graduates, driving sustainable economic growth and development (Asuquo & Mary, 2014).

It is also important to state that Universities need to foster a more comprehensive understanding of employability among undergraduates by improving lecturer factors through integrating employability skills training into the curriculum and promoting collaborative learning experiences, Universities can better prepare students for the demands of the job market (Bashar, 2023; Pitan & Adedeji, 2012).

The Role of Lecturer's Competence in Undergraduates' Employability

Lecturer competence is one of the most significant determinants of the quality of higher education and undergraduates' employability. In contemporary academic discourse, lecturer competence is broadly conceptualised as comprising two fundamental dimensions: content competence (expertise in subject matter) and delivery competence (effectiveness in pedagogical methods) (Capone et al., 2021). These competencies are not mutually exclusive but interdependent, collectively shaping students' learning experiences and subsequent transition into the workforce. The relationship between lecturer competence and student outcomes is particularly crucial in employability, as employers increasingly seek graduates with technical expertise and adaptable skills. Studies highlight that lecturers with strong content expertise enhance students' critical thinking and problem-solving abilities, which are vital for workforce adaptability (Rianti & Salsabilah, 2024; Luo & Li, 2024).

The importance of lecturer competence extends beyond mere knowledge transmission. Competent lecturers serve as role models, mentors, and facilitators of professional development, helping students bridge the gap between academic learning and workplace requirements (Rubeba & William, 2019). Their ability to contextualize theoretical concepts within practical applications significantly influences students' perceptions of their career readiness. Moreover, in an era of rapid technological advancement and evolving industry demands, the role of lecturers in preparing students for the dynamic job market has never been more critical (Akram et al., 2022). Thus, establishing the foundational understanding of lecturer competence as a multifaceted construct directly impacting educational quality and, by extension, graduate employability.

Content Competence

Content competence represents the cornerstone of effective teaching in higher education. It encompasses a lecturer's comprehensive mastery of their subject area, including up-to-date knowledge of theoretical frameworks, practical applications, and emerging trends within their discipline (See et al., 2021). A lecturer with strong content competence possesses factual knowledge and the ability to critically analyse and synthesise information, making complex concepts accessible to diverse learners. This depth of understanding enables lecturers to anticipate and address student misconceptions, adapt their teaching to various learning styles, and foster higher order thinking skills essential for professional success.

The manifestation of content competence extends to curriculum development and instructional design. Lecturers must continuously update course materials to reflect industry practices and technological advancements (Rubeba & William, 2019). For instance, in fields like measurement and evaluation, where methodologies and tools evolve rapidly, lecturers must maintain cutting-edge knowledge to ensure students acquire relevant, marketable skills (Sarwandi et al., 2022). Research indicates that students perceive lecturers with strong content expertise as more credible and inspiring, enhancing their learning engagement and motivation (Ubamadu et al., 2022). However, challenges persist, particularly in developing nations where limited access to recent publications, inadequate professional development opportunities, and heavy teaching loads may hinder lecturers' ability to maintain and enhance their content competence (Li & Li, 2022).

Delivery Competence

While content competence provides the "what" of teaching, delivery competence addresses the "how" - the pedagogical skills that make knowledge transmission effective and engaging. Delivery competence encompasses a broad range of skills, including clear verbal communication, effective use of non-verbal cues, classroom management strategies, and the ability to create inclusive learning environments (Rubeba, 2025). Research in educational psychology emphasizes that even the most knowledgeable lecturers may fail to impact student learning if they lack proficiency in delivering content in an accessible and stimulating manner (Luo & Li, 2024).

The digital transformation of education has added new dimensions to the delivery of competence. Modern lecturers must utilise various technological tools - from learning management systems to interactive multimedia - to enhance student engagement and facilitate learning modalities (Sutherland et al., 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the importance of technological pedagogical skills, as many lecturers struggled to adapt to online teaching environments (Akram et al., 2022). Studies show that students value lecturers who can skillfully blend traditional teaching methods with innovative digital approaches, often leading to more comprehensive learning experiences (See et al., 2021). Furthermore, delivery competence includes the lecturer's ability to

provide constructive feedback, facilitate discussions, and create opportunities for active learning - all of which contribute significantly to students' professional confidence and perceived employability (Sarwandi et al., 2022).

Significance of Lecturers' Content and Delivery Competence for Undergraduates' Employability

Existing literatures reveal that the qualities of lecturers significantly influence students' employability by providing them with essential knowledge and skills. Lecturers' content competence provides students with the knowledge and intellectual tools they need to thrive in the workforce. When lecturers possess deep and current expertise, they are better able to structure learning experiences that promote critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. These skills are consistently identified as vital for success in today's complex and dynamic labor markets. Previous studies also emphasize that critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills are among the most desirable competencies for employers globally, enabling graduates to navigate and adapt to professional challenges effectively (Heimler & Morote, 2019).

In addition to mastery of content, lecturers' delivery competence plays a crucial role in preparing students for employment. Delivery competence includes the ability to communicate complex ideas clearly, engage students through interactive teaching methods, and relate abstract theories to practical, real-world scenarios. Effective delivery ensures that students do not merely memorize concepts but also understand their relevance and application in professional settings. The ability of lecturers to bridge theory and practice through delivery methods such as case studies, simulations, and problem-based learning is essential for fostering adaptability and contextual awareness among students, qualities highly valued by employers (Knight & Yorke, 2003). This kind of delivery encourages active engagement, deep learning, and the development of transferable skills that can be applied across a range of employment contexts (Yorke, 2006).

Moreover, competent lecturers contribute to students' self-confidence and career preparedness. When students are taught by lecturers who are both knowledgeable and capable of delivering material effectively, they are more likely to feel motivated and capable of meeting the expectations of the professional world. This confidence is itself a key component of employability, as it influences graduates' ability to market themselves to potential employers, perform effectively in interviews, and succeed in workplace settings.³³ Beyond technical and cognitive skills, lecturers also serve as role models, demonstrating professional behaviors, attitudes, and approaches to continuous learning that students may later emulate in their careers. This hidden curriculum helps students internalize the soft skills and workplace ethics that are often as important as formal knowledge in securing and sustaining employment (Harvey, 2001).

Contributing Factors and Challenges Associated with Lecturers' Competence in Nigerian Universities

One significant issue related to lecturer factors in Nigerian universities is the continued reliance on traditional teaching methods poses another challenge for lecturers. Many lecturers still utilise old learning practices with little incorporation of technology, active learning, or relevant case studies from the industry. This teaching style hinders the development of the practical and soft skills demanded by modern employers. Moreover, the failure to adapt teaching methods to global

trends like digital literacy, data analysis, and entrepreneurship education further reduces the employability of graduates.

Additionally, to provide effective employability training, it is crucial for lecturers to engage with the industry to ensure their teaching remains relevant. However, Nigerian universities often lack strong collaborations with employers, professional organizations, and industry experts. This disconnect leads to a situation where lecturers cannot equip students with the knowledge, skills, and experiences needed in the workplace. As a result, graduates may have a solid theoretical foundation but struggle to apply this knowledge in practical scenarios. The lack of university-industry collaboration makes it difficult for lecturers to connect academic learning with labor market demands.

Furthermore, an innovative and regularly renewed curriculum is fundamental to enhancing lecturers' delivery competence because it provides the structure and content that allow lecturers to teach in ways that are relevant, dynamic, and aligned with evolving industry and labour market needs. When curricula integrate emerging skills, interdisciplinary approaches, and opportunities for experiential learning, lecturers are better positioned to deliver lessons that engage students and equip them with practical competencies for the modern workforce.

However, there is a challenge where lecturers often operate within fixed curricula that do not permit the inclusion of emerging skills, interdisciplinary methods, or experiential learning. Even when lecturers are eager to innovate, institutional red tape and sluggish curriculum revision processes impede necessary updates to course content and teaching practices. This gap leaves students unprepared for roles that require flexible and innovative skill sets.

Lastly, the job satisfaction and motivation of lecturers have a direct impact on the quality of teaching they offer. Issues such as low pay, delayed salaries, insufficient research funding, and poor working conditions dishearten many academic staff in Nigerian universities. These factors diminish lecturers' enthusiasm for teaching innovation and hinder their ability to provide effective mentorship and career guidance for students. Frequent strikes by academic unions due to adequate incentives also disrupt the learning process and have adverse effects on student outcomes, including their readiness for employment.

Way Forward

The role of lecturers' competence is crucial in determining the employability of graduates. Their expertise in subject matter and teaching methods greatly affects students' ability to gain the knowledge, skills, and attitudes essential for success in the job market. However, issues such as outdated teaching methods, insufficient professional development opportunities hinder the positive effects lecturers could have on graduate employability. To tackle these issues, a focused approach and deliberate efforts from universities, policymakers, and stakeholders is necessary to enhance lecturer competencies through ongoing training, updates to the curriculum, and investment in teaching resources. By improving lecturer competencies and ensuring academic programmes meet labour market demands, universities in Nigeria can produce graduates who are not only knowledgeable but also equipped with the practical skills needed to succeed in a competitive and evolving economy. To achieve this, the following actions are recommended:

- 1. Recruitment of Qualified and Competent Lecturers:** The Nigerian government and private university owners should take deliberate steps to hire more qualified lecturers to enhance the quality of higher education. Employing well-trained and experienced lecturers

ensures that students receive up-to-date knowledge and practical skills relevant to the modern labor market. Prioritizing lecturer quality is therefore essential for improving graduate employability and overall educational standards.

- 2. University–Industry Partnerships:** It is also essential for Nigerian universities to proactively establish partnerships with industries, professional organizations, and government agencies. These collaborations can lead to guest lectures from industry professionals, internship opportunities for students, joint research initiatives, and curriculum guidance that aligns with labour market needs.
- 3. Continuous Professional Development Through Incentives and Improved Teaching Resources:** To encourage ongoing professional development among lecturers, universities should offer promotions, grants, and awards that support continuous learning and the adoption of innovative teaching methods. Universities can facilitate participation in local and international conferences, allowing lecturers to discover best practices that enhance graduate employability. Additionally, universities should enhance both physical and digital resources available to lecturers. Access to modern teaching tools, e-learning platforms, and smart classrooms allows lecturers to present content effectively and engage students through various instructional approaches.
- 4. Mandatory and Periodic Professional Development Programmes:** Universities should implement mandatory and periodic professional development programmes for lecturers, focusing on contemporary teaching methods and digital skills for incorporating employability skills in their instruction. Workshops and certification courses on innovative teaching strategies will help lecturers remain abreast of labor market trends.
- 5. Review and Update of Economics Curriculum to Enhance Practical Relevance:** Institutions should review and update the Economics curriculum to incorporate practical, industry-relevant content. Lecturers should be given flexibility to introduce case studies, simulations, and project-based learning that reflect real-world economic challenges and solutions. This will bridge the gap between theoretical learning and practical application.

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