

## Cognition of Training Functionality as Organizational Challenge For Quality Assurance in Nigerian Learning Institutions

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### Abstract

*The study investigated the quality assurance attributes of training being given in the Nigerian higher learning institutions. This was assessed by examining the cognition of training functionality vis-à-vis the ability to correlate the courses of study with their practical endeavours. The hypothesis tested in the study at  $P < .05$  states that "development of the cognitive ability of trainees to correlate training to its practical endeavours has not been effectively achieved for the Nigerian leaning institutions". A total of 348 participants were systemically (intervally) sampled from a population of about 800 trainees (final-year students) of Anambra State University, Nigeria. The data which attained interval measurement were obtained from the participants' semester mini-examination (quiz) scores. The study assessed three areas of practical endeavours as creativity, community participation, and entrepreneurship. The participants were expected to identify for each area not less than 10 practical applications of their courses of study. Only the most significant and realistic points were scored for 10 marks for each area. The study had 2 x 3 factorial design and multivariate inferential analyses, supported by descriptive statistics. The results of the analyses showed that trainees from the Nigerian higher learning institutions achieved average cognition of the correlates between their courses of study and their practical endeavours. Interestingly, the female gender had better cognition of this assessment, though still resolving around the average. However, the cognition of the correlate between the courses of study and community participation was below average. The possible causes of the study's outcome could be attributed to poor training facilities, more conceptual training than practical training, possible incompetence of the trainers, trainees' unseriousness etc. It is therefore recommended for the training in the Nigeria learning institutions to be more functional-based than conceptual. The Nigerian learning institutions should also be well funded.*

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**Keywords:** cognition, training-functionality, organizational-challenge, quality-assurance, Nigeria, learning-institutions

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### INTRODUCTION

Cognition is the mental activities associated with thinking, knowing, and understanding. Learning, which is a relatively permanent change in behaviour arising from experience, is made possible by cognition. The University, which is the apex of the formal learning system, is regarded as being functional when its training stimulates freedom and justice, as well as the thriving of the private and public endeavours (Nwankwo, Nwankwo, and Nweke, 2009). Such training enhances quality assurance goal of the learning institutions. Learning is the mental attribute of training. Essentially, training is a planned effort by an organization to facilitate the learning of task-related behaviours by an individual. Institutions of higher learning are basically training organizations for the development of skills and other capacity-building potential of individual (Maima, 2009). It is therefore an organizational challenge confronting the Nigerian higher institutions to produce human resources that are capable of relating training concepts into functional applications.

Increasing unemployment among graduates in Nigeria has necessitated the need to organize the

training of the higher institutions of learning towards entrepreneurship objectives. Credence is given to this notion based on the observation of Eneh, Mbanefoh, and Amakom (2009) that poor educational quality is the maintaining variable to poverty. Presently, in Nigeria, the training programmes are more theoretical than practical. This seems to make transfer of learning and its entrepreneurial applications rather inconceivable. There is therefore the need to restructure the training focus of the higher institutions organizations to be adaptive. Adapted training integrates productivity with the needs of the environment and society (Odaman and Nwachukwu, 2009). This is because the individual (trainee) has acquired adequate understanding (cognition) of the functional application (relatedness) of the training. The training will be instrumental in community participation, as well as finding solutions to both personal and socio-human challenges.

To be able to impact qualitative training, the organization of the higher institutions of learning must be quality assurance empowering. This can be achieved when there is a systematic acquisition of

skills, rules, concepts or attitudes that result in improved performance in the environment. This enhances an individual's ability and competence to relate concepts with functionality, as well as use the acquired knowledge from training to create opportunities and wealth. Undoubtedly, the major organizational challenge facing the Nigerian higher institutions of learning is to use their training to achieve effective human resources management that would be enterprising and achieve greater performance (Okorie, 2009).

This is quality assurance of training that entails being able to relate conceptual training to applied needs. And this cognitive relatedness was investigated in a University in Nigeria. The study and its findings are summarily presented below.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims at achieving the following goals:

- Investigate the prospect of the Nigerian graduates vis-à-vis wealth-creation and employment opportunities;
- Explore the functional efficacy of the training programmes of the Nigerian learning institutions;
- Bring into focus the organizational challenge facing a typical Nigerian training institution vis-à-vis the development of functional skills;
- Assess the extent of quality assurance of the Nigerian learning programmes and institutions;
- Assess the abilities of the trainees to achieve functional relatedness of training;
- Infer the capacity-building competencies that are characteristics of a typical Nigerian learning organizations;
- Proffer recommendations on ways of improving qualitative, functional, and entrepreneurial enhancing training in the Nigerian learning institutions; etc.

### Scope of the Study

The subject matter of the study is an examination of the effectiveness of the Nigerian learning institutions to impact knowledge that has rewarding applications in endeavours. This subject-matter was perceived as an organizational challenge for Nigerian training institutions. Hence, the study embraces an appraisal of the trainees' cognitive abilities to related training to practical endeavours. The study was conducted in the University setting of the Anambra State University, Igbariam and Uli campuses, Nigeria. The final-year students of both genders were used for the study. The participants were composed of

diverse ethnic, socioeconomic, and socio-personality characteristics. The scope of functionality assessed in the study was the attributes of creativity, community participation, and entrepreneurship. And training functionality in the study embraces the quality of the learning from higher institutions being very suitable for creating opportunities, striving for success, and being venturesome to accomplish tasks. These are the noble features of any well focused training programme, and attaining them is synonymous with achieving quality assurance envisioned in the study.

### METHODOLOGY

**Propositions:** The propositions for the study were a research hypothesis, and a research question. The **hypothesis** was tested at  $P < .05$ , and it states that "development of cognitive ability of trainees to correlate training to its practical endeavours has not been effectively achieved for Nigerian learning institutions". The research question examines whether the Nigerian learning institutions have been effective in inculcating the cognitive transfer of training to practical endeavours?

**Sample:** A total of three hundred and forty-eighty (348) participants were systematically sampled for the study from a population of over eight hundred (800) final-year students of Anambra State University, Nigeria. The participants were sampled across the faculties of sciences, Arts and Social sciences, Management Sciences, Environmental Sciences, and Agriculture. Symmetry of one hundred and seventy-four (174) participants was sampled for each gender.

**Data:** The data for the study were of primary source. They were obtained from the scores of the mid-term (mid-semester) semi-examination given to the participants. On completion of their semester course work, the participants were given a 30% mini-examination. The mini-examination (or quiz as it is popularly called and known in Nigerian learning institutions) assessed the participants' general understanding of their course of study, and the corresponding functional relevance as well as applications in fields of human endeavours. Essentially the mini-examination investigated the participants' understanding of the relevance and applications of their courses of study in three areas of human endeavours. These areas are creativity, community participation, and entrepreneurship with each area having a score of 10% of the 30% for the entire mini-examination. The data attained interval scale.

**Design and Statistics:** The study had 2x3 factorial designs. The factors were the gender factor (the

male and female genders) as against the training functionality factor (the creativity, community participation, and entrepreneurship). The gender had two factors, while the training functionality had three factors. The statistics employed for the study were 2 x 3 multivariate analyses (inferential statistics) and descriptive analyses. The inferential statistics were employed to test the propositions (hypothesis and research question), while the descriptive statistics were adopted to compare the relative performance of the factors. As the data attained interval measurement, the type of inferential statistics used was the parametric type.

**Procedure:** Final-year students as trainees, who were on the verge of graduation, were used for the study. They were tested on their knowledge of the

various relevant areas of endeavours that their courses of study can be applied so as to create work opportunities and growth for them. The aim was to assess the students' cognitive preparation to embrace the challenge of work-life after graduation. The unwanted variables in the study were controlled through systematic random sampling of the participants.

**RESULTS**

The results of the tested hypothesis are presented in table 1.1 below. The analyses of the table showed the gender test, training functionality test, and their interactions effects test. It showed that the trainees (students) could not effectively correlate the training from their courses of study to practical endeavours.

Table 1.1 Multi-variant inferential statistics/analyses of trainees' cognitive ability to correlate training to its practical endeavours

Source of Variation	df	SS	MS	F-ratio	P<.05
Trainees' Gender (A)	1	6.50	6.50	1.8226	3.86
Cognitive Functionality (B)	2	7.26	3.63	1.0168	3.02
Trainees' Gender x Cognitive Functionality (A.B)	2	28.20	14.10	3.9488	3.02
Within	342	1151.14	3.37		
Total	347	1193.10			
<b>Critical Values</b> ( {df=1; 2; 234} @ P<.05: F(A & B) < 3.86 & 3.02; F(A.B)>3.02; Accept H <sub>0</sub> (A & B); but reject H <sub>0</sub> (A.B))					

Source of Data: In-course assessment of final-year students of Anambra State University, Nigeria

Table 1.2 Descriptive statistics/analyses table for trainees' ability to correlated training to its practical endeavours

	Factors/variables	X	N	%	SD
<b>Factor A</b> Trainees' Gender	Male Trainees	5.44	174	48.83	5.25
	Female Trainees	5.70	174	51.17	5.54
	Total	11.14	348	100	
	<b>Critical Decision Points: X = 5.00; % = 50</b>				
<b>Factor B</b> Functionality of Training	Creativity	5.72	116	34.27	2.04
	Community Participation	5.39	116	32.29	1.62
	Entrepreneurship	5.58	116	33.44	1.41
	Total	16.69	348	100	
<b>Critical Decision Points: X = 5.00; % = 33.33</b>					
<b>Factor A x B</b> Interactional Effect	Male Trainees, and Creativity	5.61	58	16.81	2.04
	Male Trainees, and Community Participation	4.99	58	14.95	1.52
	Male Trainees, and Entrepreneurship	5.68	58	17.02	1.54
	Female Trainees, and Creativity	5.84	58	17.50	2.09
	Female Trainees, and Community Participation	5.77	58	17.29	1.77
	Female Trainees, and Entrepreneurship	5.48	58	16.44	1.68
	Total	33.37	348	100	
<b>Critical Decision Points: X = 5.00; % = 16.67</b>					

Source of Data: In-course assessment of final-year students of Anambra State University, Nigeria

Analyses of the table 1.1 above show that the observed/calculated F-value (1.8226) for trainees' FACTOR (A) gender is lesser than its critical table-value (3.86). This indicates that the trainees of both genders could not effectively correlate their courses of study to practical endeavours. Similarly, the observed/calculated F-value (1.0168) for cognitive functionality FACTOR (B) is lesser than its critical table-value (3.02). It shows that none of the functional areas tested (creativity, community participation, and entrepreneurship) could be effectively correlated with courses of study. On the

Analyses of table 1.2 above show that for FACTOR A, both genders' means (Xs) (male = 5.44; female = 5.70) are greater than their common critical mean X (5.00), while their percentages (%) are 48.83% and 51.17% respectively. It indicates that the female gender could correlate their courses of study to practical endeavours more than the male gender. For the FACTOR B, the critical means X (creativity = 5.72, community participation = 5.39, and entrepreneurship = 5.58) are greater than the critical mean X = 5.00, while their means Xs are 34.27%, 32.29%, and 33.44% respectively, in which 32.29% for community participation is lesser than their common critical percentage % of 33.33%. The results indicate that the cognition for creativity and entrepreneurship have average functional correlate with the courses of study, unlike community participation that has below average functional correlate with the course of study. For the FACTORS A.B, the interactions show that the male's cognition of the correlate between the courses of study, and community participation is just below average (X = 4.99; % = 14.95%). The female's cognition of the correlate between the courses of study, and creativity is a little bit above average (X = 5.84; % = 17.50%).

## DISCUSSION

One major implication of the finding of the study is that training in the Nigerian learning institutions are predominantly more conceptual than practical. Consequently on graduation, the trainees find it rather difficult to achieve transfer of leaning that enhances growth. On completion of their training, Nigerian graduates should be able to develop core competencies that would enable them (graduates) achieve superior performance in human endeavours. Osioma, and Nnabuife (2009) noted the attributes of core competencies as being able to achieve superior qualities in service, innovation, team-work, flexible responsiveness, etc that enhance achievement prowess. These are qualities of a good training programme which is seemingly deficient in the courses of study in a typical Nigerian University.

other hand, the observed/calculated value (3.9488) is greater than the critical table-value (3.02) for the interactions effect of trainees' gender and cognitive functionality factors (A.B). This implies that even with this ineffectiveness in correlating courses of study to practical endeavours, significant variations still exist on the genders' cognitive performance. A clearer understanding of the characteristics of these analyses, results, and findings of table 1.1 above are expounded in table 1.2 below. The descriptive statistics were employed to enhance the clarity and meaningful comprehension of the table 1.2.

From the findings of the study, trainees from the Nigerian higher learning institutions are just average in their cognitions of the correlates between course of study, and practical endeavours. This connotes a challenge of being unprepared to face the scarcity of employment opportunities after graduation. The not-very-impressive (average cognition) cognition of how the courses of study correlate with practical endeavours could be the reason why many Nigerian graduates are unemployable. This entails that they lack the requisite skills and competencies for meaningful profession or career. This corresponds with Nwanna's (2009) observation that there is a problem of finding skilled labour out of the numerous available graduates.

The above position therefore presents the Nigerian higher learning institutions as only conventional social structures, since their noble objectives of training resourceful persons are not effectively being met or achieved. The organization (both as a process and institution/structure) of the Nigerian learning institutions should therefore be practice-minded. The organization should also be efficacious in stimulating brainstorming and creativity generation (Omisore, 2009). This is a major strategy of impacting functional cognition and application of trainings being offered in the Nigerian higher learning institutions.

The study proves a below average cognition of the correlates between the courses of study and their practices in community participation. It shows that the training being received from the Nigerian higher learning institutions is not adaptive to the local needs. Possibly, the training in the Nigerian higher learning institutions is modeled to be globalization compliant, which unfortunately has failed to integrate community participation. Such training is a failure in being instrumental for sustainable development. A sustainable training is the type that enhances quality assurance of learning, by impacting knowledge that helps meet the need of the present generation (intergeneration equity), while at the same time seeks for and protects the benefits and interests of the future generation (intergeneration equity) (Oloruntegbe, Akinsete, Ayeni, and Odutuyi, 2009).

It is possible that variables in the trainers and trainees, as well as the institution could be the inhibitors to effective cognition of training functionality. The trainers (teachers) could be deficient in the knowledge, proficiency, and the skills to inculcate functional training. The trainees on their own part may not be motivated to perceive the reward in mental tasking of being studious. This could be attributed to the social belief in Nigeria that success and achievement are functions of “connection” – who one knows and relates with. There are also very poor learning facilities. All these variables breed inhibitors to the graduates’ development of natural creative and strategic think-style (Kukuru, 2009).

## CONCLUSION

This is an investigation of the training functionality of the courses of study in the Nigeria higher learning institution. The findings revealed that the trainees could only achieve average cognition of the correlates between the courses of study, and their practical endeavours. Even with this, the female trainees were able to relate the relevance of courses of study to practical endeavours more than the male trainees. However, the cognition of the correlates between the courses of study, and community participation were below average. It showed that the courses of study in the Nigeria higher learning institutions were not adaptive to local needs. The organizations of the learning institutions should live up to this challenge.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are proffered as emanated from the findings:

It is recommended that the training programme in the Nigerian learning institutions should be functionality focused. This is a major way of enhancing transfer of training.

Again, the organization of the learning institutions should restructure the training programme to adapt to local needs. This is a significant way of localizing globalization and using it to solve local and national challenges.

In the same vein, there is the need to promote the attitude of being studious among the learners in the Nigerian learning institutions. Presently, the perception is more on the certificate than the quality of the certificate (quality assurance). Learners want to have the certificate without being studious.

Similarly, there is the need to fund the learning institutions effectively. This will help promote functional training in the institutions. Basically, on graduation, life is more practical than conceptual. Adequate funding will help provide training facilities for the trainees.

Furthermore, the trainers on their own part should engage in self-development regularly. This will help a lot in embellishing their skills and competencies to impact the requisite capacity-building for trainees’ efficiency on graduation.

Essentially, there should be a value reorientation that will eliminate organizational and systemic corruption in the Nigerian learning institutions. Organisaitonal and systemic corruption come in form of trading examination scores for money, gifts, or sex. They come in form of commercializing admissions into the learning institutions. There is also the impersonation of examinations candidature. All these are dimensions of corruption practices that hamper the quality assurance attainment of the training goals of the Nigerian learning institutions. They need to be tackled drastically and curbed, so as to improve the cognition and functionality of the courses of study.

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