

Skills Acquisition from Digital Coaching Platforms: Impact on Employability in South West Nigeria

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Introduction

Africa is currently witnessing a significant transformation in its information technology (IT) ecosystem. This remarkable technological change is driven by increased internet penetration, mobile technology and digital adoption, with countries such as South Africa, Rwanda, Nigeria, Kenya, Egypt, Ghana, Tunisia, and Morocco at the forefront of this digital expansion (Abere & Constantinides, 2021; Statista, 2023). In Nigeria, one notable feature of this momentum in digital technology adoption is the growing reliance on digital coaching platforms as a means of acquiring new skills, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 crisis. The proliferation of online learning is especially prevalent among Nigeria's vast youthful population, comprising individuals either engaged in the formal sector as employees or self-employed as entrepreneurs who seek to reskill or upskill, as well as those aspiring to begin their entrepreneurial endeavours, across various sectors of the economy (Ogwu et al., 2023; Statista, 2023; Zubairu et al., 2023; Okolo-Obasi et al., 2025). This trend is largely driven by its inherent flexibility, shorter learning duration, its strong emphasis on practical, professional, and vocational competencies, as well as its focus on industry-relevant content and emerging technologies. In contrast, conventional training programmes are often costly and tend to remain confined within the boundaries of traditional academic curricula. Therefore, these platforms have been described as a compelling alternative to conventional training models (Nwaokugha & Wogonwu, 2023; Zubairu et al., 2023).

According to Wahab and Akintade (2025), this growing dependence on digital coaching platforms for more dynamic, accessible, and personalised learning represents more than just a trend. It marks a fundamental paradigm shift in how knowledge and skills are delivered in a democratised form, where skill acquisition is no longer constrained by geographical boundaries or rigid schedules. In the information technology sector, for instance, tech giants from the USA and China, alongside home-grown companies, are now making substantial investments in large-scale capacity-building and skills development programmes in Nigeria. As noted by Abere and Constantinides (2021), these low-cost online courses that provide hands-on training, are proving to be an effective means of delivering technical training, enabling participants to become software developers, data scientists, or business analysts without necessarily obtaining a traditional college degree.

This shift toward skill acquisition through digital coaching platforms has been driven by two major factors. Firstly, Nigeria is currently grappling with a serious unemployment crisis. Despite holding formal qualifications, a significant portion of young Nigerians struggle to secure gainful employment

(Nigerian Economic Summit Group [NESG] 2024). The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023) reported that the unemployment rate among graduates has consistently exceeded the national average. Secondly, as Nigeria's business environment continues to evolve under the influence of rapid technological advancement, it has become increasingly clear that graduates need to acquire skills beyond the knowledge offered in traditional classroom settings. This suggests a disparity between the skills imparted in school and those demanded by employers (Abere & Constantinides, 2021; Othman et al., 2021). Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have been criticised for contributing to the persistent skills mismatch, as their curricula are said to fail to provide students with the practical employability skills required in today's labour market (Aljumah, 2023; Ikenga & Okpuzor, 2025).

In Southwest Nigeria, the situation is no different, despite various government programmes and initiatives aimed at developing the workforce. According to Ebekozen et al. (2023), stakeholders continue to express concern, arguing that Nigeria's university system requires a comprehensive integration of practical skills in order to enhance the employability of its graduates.

It is against this backdrop that the chapter discusses the role of digital coaching platforms in filling the employability gap among graduates in Africa, using Southwest Nigeria as case study. It highlights the experiences of graduates with digital coaching platforms; assess the functionality of digital coaching platforms in employability skill acquisition; and determine what HEIs can learn from the approaches adopted by training facilitators on digital coaching platforms and how they can integrate such into their educational programmes. This chapter provides answers to the following questions: What are the experiences of graduates and entrepreneurs with digital coaching platforms? How effective and functional are these platforms in the provision of employability skills and entrepreneurial skills? Can HEIs in Africa learn from the approaches adopted by trainers and facilitators on digital coaching platforms?

This chapter is organised into six sections. As a follow up on this introductory, section two discusses the literature on digital coaching platforms and the employability/unemployment nexus. Sections three and four present the theoretical framework and the methodology, respectively. Section five focuses on analysis and discussions, while section six provides a summary and conclusion, as well as recommendations and suggestions for further study.

Literature Review

A large body of work has explored the role of skills acquisition generally. From 2019, however, mainly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, more studies have shifted from studying traditional modes of skills acquisition to the role of digital coaching platforms. The consensus that exists in the literature seems to suggest that skills acquisition from digital platforms presents an opportunity for closing the graduate employability gap in developing countries. Examples for studies arguing this for Nigeria include Nwaokugha and Wogonwu (2023), Zubairu et al. (2023), Ogwu et al. (2023), Wahab and Akintade (2025), Aljumah (2023), Ikenga and Okpuzor (2025), and Okolo-Obasi et al. (2025). Their insights will be referred to in the following literature review, which will first present the relevant concepts of "digital coaching platforms", "employability" and "unemployment". It will then discuss

empirical issues discussed in the literature for Nigeria, including employability and unemployment in Nigeria, as well as the role of digital coaching platforms.

Digital coaching platforms

Digital coaching platforms are online platforms that facilitate individuals' access to educational resources, training programmes, mentorships, and coaching services, which allows them to enhance their personal and professional development. Leveraging digital technologies, these platforms provide remote learning experiences that enable users to access educational content and engage with coaches or mentors virtually. Typically, these platforms offer a range of courses and training programmes that cover subjects such as entrepreneurship, leadership development, career advancement, personal growth, and technical skills, among others. Digital coaching platforms provide a flexible learning environment that allows users to learn at their own pace and convenience. Platform content typically encompasses formats such as video lessons, webinars, interactive modules, e-books, assessments and multimedia resources.

A key feature of digital coaching platforms is the availability of expert coaches and mentors who provide personalised guidance, support, and feedback to learners. Coaches may deliver live coaching sessions, one-on-one mentoring, or group coaching sessions through the online platform. Additionally, these platforms often incorporate discussion forums, chat functionalities, and networking opportunities to foster a sense of community and collaboration among learners. Such features enable users to connect with peers, share experiences, and learn from one another. Prominent examples of digital coaching platforms include Udemy, Coursera, LinkedIn Learning, Futurelearn, SkillNG, and Nigerian Learning Passport (NLP). Moreover, some platforms also engage with learners through social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and others. Digital coaching platforms have gained popularity due to their accessibility, affordability and convenience.

Employability

The concept of employability is not new in the literature. It is generally considered to describe an array of skills, values and personal attributes that increase graduates' chances of securing employment in a competitive labour market. Agboola (2022) considers employability to be the ability to translate and apply the knowledge and skills that students have acquired through education to bring about increased job creation, cost-effectiveness, and a high level of productivity in an organisation. In summary, it refers to the graduate's potential to gain skills and personal attributes required to succeed in graduate level job placement. Some relevant employability skills include communication abilities, teamwork, managerial skills, problem-solving and innovative, critical thinking. Equally, an employee who possesses employable skills is expected to have the right attitude, initiative, and ability to recognise opportunities, and the self-confidence to take risks to achieve success and become an asset to the organisation.

Unemployment

According to the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, unemployment refers to the proportion of the labour force who are available and actively seeking employment but could not find work, relative to the total currently active labour force population. The active labour force is defined as: all the persons aged 15-64, excluding students, home keepers, retirees, stay at home parents and persons unable to work or not fit to work (NBS, 2019). This implies that an individual who does absolutely nothing at all or did something but for less than 20 hours during the reference week is considered as unemployed. Based on the above, graduate unemployment can be viewed as a condition in which able, qualified, and willing graduates from tertiary institutions cannot find a job to do (Ajiboye et al., 2013).

These categories of people have been broadly classified into two groups: graduates who are suitably qualified for job position but have not gotten any and those who were retrenched from their previous jobs into the labour market, who are seeking for another job. Nevertheless, in this study, our focus shall be on the graduates, who desire to work as professionals in the formal sector and those who are currently employed or who are self-employed.

The “employability gap” in Nigeria

Empirical studies present mixed results on the factors that account for graduate unemployment. However there appears to be a consensus that an “employability gap” exists. For instance, in a report commissioned by the British Council, Adedeji and Oyebade (2015) reported that the major factor responsible for the high rate of graduate unemployment in Nigeria is that job seekers do not have the skills necessary to fill the existing vacant positions. According to them, Nigerian employers believe that university graduates are inadequately trained and lack the skills that can make them employable, due to an alleged drop in academic standards over the past decades. Sodipo (2014) reported that some employers in Nigeria found newly employed graduates lacking in technical, analytical, conceptual and even communication skills. These employers claimed that they spend huge amounts to train and retrain new employees to make them perform optimally. Thus, there is a general perception that university graduates are “half-baked” due to the disparity between skills acquired by students and those required in the Nigerian labour market. In 2011, Depo Oyedokun, then Chair of the House Committee on Youth and Social Development, claimed that of the over 40 million unemployed youths in the country, 23 million were unemployable and therefore susceptible to crime, adding that most graduates lack relevant marketable skills (Emeh, 2012).

Several reasons have been put forward for the dearth in employability skills among Nigerian graduates. We briefly summarise these by classifying these into three main groups. The first is related to the perception among students that university education is all about acquiring a university certificate (Yinusa & Ohiani, 2021; Pitan, 2016; Philips Consulting, 2014). The next set are institutional factors such as inadequate provision of infrastructure such as poor power/electricity supply, unstable academic calendar, inadequate instructional materials for teaching and laboratory equipment to conduct practical experiments, lack of functional and well-equipped laboratory and e-library facilities, inadequate university-industry linkages, non-functional curriculum and incompetent staff (Adedeji et al., 2019).

Lastly, industry related factors i.e. new technological discoveries (i.e. Artificial Intelligence) as a result of globalisation and increased commercialisation, which is changing the way work is done in the industry (Yinusa & Ohiani, 2021).

The unemployment gap in Nigeria

The unemployment gap in Nigeria emerged prominently in the 1980s and has persisted until today. It is primarily attributable to the adverse economic conditions prevailing in the country during this period (Nwankwo & Ifeiofor, 2014; Eneji et al., 2013). According to the (Nigerian Economic Summit Group, 2024), the national unemployment rate increased to 5.3% in the first quarter of 2024 which represented a steady increase since mid-2023. The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2023) further reported that graduate unemployment has consistently exceeded the national average, rising to 13% in Q2 of 2023.

The role of digital coaching platforms for employability

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global impact of digital coaching platforms has reached Nigeria, where it contributes to the reshaping of capacity building (Nwaokugha & Wogonwu, 2023; Zubairu et al., 2023; Ogwu et al., 2023; Wahab & Akintade, 2025; Okolo-Obasi et al., 2025). Statista (2023) reports that the online learning platforms market in Nigeria is experiencing significant growth and development. This is made possible by the rapid increase in internet access. In 2024 broadband internet reached a penetration rate of 44.4% (Nigerian Communications Commission, 2024), reflecting the rising demand for digital connectivity.

According to studies by Joshua and Apuru (2024) and Uduafemhe et al. (2023), the acquisition of digital skills from online platforms exhibited a significant increase in the perceived employability prospects of accounting students in North Central Nigeria. They concluded that the acquisition of skills through digital platforms offers opportunities for individuals and organisational to solve personal, professional and socio-economic challenges. This is consistent with Olayiwola and Adesope (2021) whose found that digital coaching platforms such as Coursera, Udemy and LinkedIn Learning have been particularly effective in helping unemployed graduates to acquire skills in areas such as data analysis, digital marketing, and project management. Similarly, a study by Aondover et al. (2025) found that digital coaching platforms have the potential to reduce the employability gap in Nigeria by providing graduates with the opportunity to acquire industry-specific skills that are in demand. The study highlighted the importance of platforms such as Skillshare, Codecademy, and edX in helping unemployed graduates to acquire skills in software development, web design and graphic design. Digital coaching platforms offer opportunities for life-long learning to stay up-to-date in areas such as data analytics, Artificial Intelligence and digital marketing (Farrugia, 2024; Anugerah, 2024).

Ikenga and Okpuzor (2025) analysed the impact of digital coaching platforms on the employability of Business Education graduates in Delta State, Nigeria. They concluded that the use of digital coaching platforms through social media channels such as YouTube, LinkedIn, Facebook, WhatsApp,

and Twitter contributed to students' employability skills. They found that graduates who engaged in digital coaching platforms were more likely to be able to plan, coordinate, communicate, and effectively execute projects. Abere and Constantinides (2021) reported that over 70% of participants who completed a three-month digital course successfully secured full-time employment and freelance or short-term gig projects through online outsourcing and independent contracting platforms. Equally, Murire et al. (2023) found a positive correlation between digital platforms and graduates' skill development and perceived employability. Further studies offering evidence for the effectiveness of digital coaching platforms include Busuyi et al. (2021) and Ikenga and Egbule (2024), who state that students who actively participate in online learning on digital coaching platforms generally learn how to improve their planning, teamwork, and other independent work skills. Such engagement also helps the acquisition of soft skills sought after by employers (Ikenga & van der Sijde, 2024).

The impact of digital coaching platforms on graduate entrepreneurs in Nigeria has also been assessed. According to Adejumo et al. (2021) the application of ideas from these online platforms facilitates global competitiveness, wealth creation, poverty alleviation and job creation. This implies that digital coaching platforms could enhance the skills of Nigerian entrepreneurs. Guanah and Bebenimibo (2025) and Olanrewaju et al. (2023) found that the use of digital coaching platforms could significantly enhance the skills and knowledge of graduate entrepreneurs by connecting them with successful business leaders and entrepreneurs through online networking events, webinars and virtual mentoring sessions. This exposure to real-world entrepreneurship offers practical insights and allows participants to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts. They also found that digital coaching platforms could provide graduate entrepreneurs with access to global markets, thereby enhancing their businesses. Similarly, conclusions were reached in studies by Onyejelem and Aondover (2024) and Ibe et al. (2020).

However, some studies have also highlighted the challenges facing unemployed graduates who seek to acquire skills from digital coaching platforms. For example, a study by Wahab and Akintade (2025) found that a lack of reliable internet access and inadequate digital infrastructure remain major obstacles to the effective use of digital coaching platforms by unemployed graduates in Nigeria.

Overall, the literature suggests that digital coaching platforms have the potential to play a significant role in reducing the employability gap among unemployed graduates in Africa. However, there is a need for more research to identify the most effective approaches for using digital coaching platforms to support the skill acquisition needs of unemployed graduates, as well as to address the challenges facing these platforms in Africa.

Gaps in the literature

While there is a growing body of literature on digital skills acquisition from digital coaching platforms and the employability and unemployment gap in Africa, four major areas remain where further research is needed. Firstly, the number of empirical studies specifically focused on Nigeria is still limited. More research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of digital coaching platforms in addressing the employability and unemployment gap.

Secondly, there is a need for research that explores the role of socioeconomic factors in the utilisation and impact of digital coaching platforms for skill acquisition. Factors such as access to digital infrastructure, internet connectivity, and affordability of digital coaching platforms can significantly affect the participation and outcomes for unemployed individuals.

Thirdly, while some studies have examined the short-term outcomes of digital skills acquisition, there is a need for research that assesses the long-term impact on employability and career progression. Understanding how digital skills acquired through coaching platforms translate into sustainable employment opportunities will provide valuable insights for policy and programme development.

Fourthly, most studies focus on specific sectors or skill domains, such as technology or entrepreneurship. Further research is needed to examine the effectiveness of digital coaching platforms in developing skills relevant to a broader range of industries and sectors, including non-technical fields. In conclusion, these gaps highlight the need for more research to address the specific challenges and opportunities associated with digital skills acquisition and its impact on employability and unemployment gap in Africa.

Theoretical framework

Three theoretical models are of relevance to the study. These include human capital theory, social learning theory and diffusion of innovations theory. The human capital theory, developed by Gary Becker in the 1960s, posits that education and training are investments in human capital that lead to higher productivity and earnings. According to the theory, individuals make rational decisions about how to invest in their own education and training based on the expected returns to that investment. In the context of skill acquisition from digital coaching platforms, human capital theory suggests that individuals who acquire new skills through these platforms will be more employable and command higher wages. In other words, the theory suggests that investing in education and training can enhance individuals' skills and knowledge, leading to higher productivity and earning potential, and ultimately reducing unemployment (Becker, 1964). In the context of this study, online learning from digital coaching platforms can be seen as a form of investment in human capital, providing individuals with additional skills and knowledge to improve their employability.

The social learning theory was developed by Albert Bandura in the 1970s and it emphasises the importance of social interaction and observation in the learning process. According to the theory, individuals learn by observing the behaviour of others and the consequences of that behaviour. In the context of skill acquisition from digital coaching platforms, social learning theory suggests that individuals may be more likely to learn and adopt new skills if they see others successfully using those skills (Bandura, 1977). Accordingly, digital coaching platforms can be regarded as a social learning environment that facilitates interactions between learners and facilitators and promotes observational learning through video tutorials, case studies, and group discussions.

The diffusion of innovations theory was developed by Everett Rogers in the 1960s and it explains how new ideas and technologies spread through a population. The theory posits that the adoption of new ideas is influenced by a number of factors, including the characteristics of the innovation itself,

the communication channels used to spread the idea, and the characteristics of the individuals and organisations that adopt the innovation (Rogers, 2003). In the context of skill acquisition from digital coaching platforms, diffusion of innovations theory suggests that the adoption of new digital coaching platforms may be influenced by factors such as ease of use, perceived usefulness, and social norms around using such platforms. Thus, digital coaching platforms are considered as innovative approach to skill acquisition that has the potential to diffuse rapidly and improve employability among a large population.

These theories are relevant for the study because they provide the building blocks and a robust framework for a clear understanding of the interactive relationships among our variables of interest. They also explain the intersection between digital coaching platforms and employability and the unemployment gap among various groups of individuals in an increasingly globalised world.

Methodology and research design

This study adopted a quantitative survey research design. The target population for this study comprised employed graduates, entrepreneurs and unemployed graduates in South West Nigeria, particularly those who have used or shown interest in using digital coaching platforms for personal and professional development. A total of 222 respondents participated in the study. This included respondents who were available through professional networks, social media platforms, and alumni associations.

The researcher developed a structured self-report questionnaire, which included both closed-ended and open-ended questions, organised around the three key objectives of the study. A first section (A) addressed the experiences of graduates and graduates with digital coaching platforms. Section B focused on the effectiveness and functionality of these platforms in enhancing employability skills. Finally, section C explored what lecturers in HEIs can learn from digital coaching facilitators and how such insights can be integrated into formal education. Data collection was conducted through a combination of online and face-to-face administration of the questionnaire. This hybrid approach was employed to increase reach and ensure inclusiveness across respondents with varying levels of internet access. Interviews were held mainly in Ibadan, Oyo State, as well as in other states in Western Nigeria, including Lagos, Ekiti, Osun, Ogun and Ondo States.

The data obtained from the 222 respondents were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and graphical representations. For the open-ended questions, a thematic analysis was conducted, allowing the researcher to identify recurring themes, opinions, and suggestions from the participants. Table 26.1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents.

Table 26.1. Demographic profile of respondents

Distribution of Respondents	Parameter	Frequency	Percentage
Distribution by Gender	Male	124	56.9
	Female	94	43.1
	Total	218	100.0
Distribution by Age Range	18-24 years	69	31.7
	25-34 years	49	22.5
	35-44 years	71	32.6
	Above 45 years	29	13.3
	Total	218	100.0
Distribution by Educational Status	OND	28	12.8
	HND/BSc./Bed./BA.	126	57.8
	Master's Degree	60	27.8
	PhD	4	1.8
	Total	218	100.0
Current Employment Status	Employed full-time	85	39
	Employed part-time	12	5.5
	Self employed	60	27.5
	Unemployed but actively seeking employment	35	16.1
	Unemployed and not actively seeking employment	26	11.9
	Total	215	100.0
Year(s) of Work Experience	None	39	17.9
	Less than 1 year	23	10.6
	1-2 years	33	15.1
	3-5 years	33	15.1
	More than 5 years	90	41.3
	Total	215	100.0

Source: Field Survey (2023)

The demographic profile as indicated in Table 26.1 shows that majority of the respondents are males, which constitute 56.9%, while female made up 43.1%, and the age range of 35 to 44 years had the greatest number with 32.6%. Also, participants with first degree certificates (HND/BSc./Bed./BA.) among others made up 57.8% of respondents who took part in the survey, while 39% of them have full time jobs. The number of respondents that reported that they had more than 5 years of work experience was 41.3% of the entire sample.

Research findings

The findings of the study are presented in this section based on the research questions presented for the study in the introduction.

Experiences of graduates and graduate entrepreneurs with digital coaching platforms

Out of the 222 respondents, 148 respondents (67.9%) indicated that they had employed a digital platform to acquire a new skill in the course of doing their work. 30 respondents (13.8%) have also used such platform, but found it somewhat helpful, while 35 participants (16.1%) have never used one, but they reported that they were interested in using one. Finally, only 3 respondents (1.4%) were of the view that digital platforms are not useful, while 2 respondents (0.9%), noted that they have not used one before and they were not interested in using any. Thus, the majority of the respondents (81.7%) agreed that they relied on digital coaching platforms for skills acquisition in the past.

e also sought to find out the skills that respondents acquired from digital coaching platforms. Their responses indicate that the major skills that participants acquired from digital coaching platforms were technical skills with 40%, leadership and management skills with 28%, and communication and problem solving skills with 16% each. Communication skills include reading and writing skills, fast comprehension, foreign language and fluency while technical skills include Information Technology (IT), mechanical and craftsmanship skills. Problem solving skills include critical thinking, creativity and use of imagination.

Our respondents mentioned that they encountered several challenges on digital coaching platforms. 114 respondents (51.4%) identified poor network connectivity and inadequate power supply as the major challenges they faced in using digital platforms. Additionally, 45 respondents (20.3%) reported that the high cost of data and network provider charges, coupled with financial constraints, limited their utilisation of digital coaching platforms. Twenty respondents (9%) cited fear of scams, exposure to spam, and excessive advertisements as major barriers. Another 20 respondents (9%) indicated that distractions from other activities made it difficult for them to concentrate during online coaching sessions, while 14 respondents (6.3%) pointed to inadequate digital skills as a major obstacle to adopting online employability training. Finally, 9 respondents (4%) could not specify the exact reasons limiting their use of digital coaching platforms.

This result of this survey aligns with the findings of Guanah and Bebenimibo (2025), as well as Wahab and Akintade (2025), who also identified inadequate power supply, limited access to reliable internet, financial exclusion/high cost of digital devices, fear of cybercrime, and low levels of digital literacy as key barriers to the adoption and utilisation of digital coaching platforms.

Functionality of digital coaching platforms in employability skill acquisition

First, we sought to find out the perception of our respondents as to the major drivers of unemployment in Nigeria. Interestingly, 67 respondents (31%) stated that lack of adequate job opportunities was the major cause of unemployment, while 62 respondents (29%) were of the view that corruption, favouritism and nepotism accounted for unemployment. 42 respondents (19%) blamed unfavourable government policies, while 28 respondents (13%) agreed that inadequate education and skills required by employers due to defective and non-practical educational curriculum were responsible for the challenge of unemployment. Lastly, 10 and 7 respondents (5% and 3%) agreed that high population and economic recession were major factors that resulted in unemployment. Only 13% of the respondents

saw a skills gap, which suggests that the focus on employability and the belief in the existence of a (digital) skills gap that is so prevalent in the literature may not be widely shared among Nigerians.

Although only 28 respondents had identified a skills gap, 174 participants (80%) were of the opinion that the contents taught on online learning platforms can increase the chances of Nigerian graduates to secure formal jobs. 9 respondents (4.1%) did not agree, with the above assertion, while 35 respondents (16.1%) were undecided. When the question was formulated slightly differently, 115 respondents (52.8%) reported that digital platforms were very effective in helping Nigerian graduates to develop skills and competencies that will help them to secure their desired jobs. 75 respondents (34%) said that they were somewhat effective, while 21 participants (9.6%) neither agreed nor disagreed, while 7 respondents (3%) considered digital platforms not very effective. To separate opinion from empirical experience, we asked our participants whether they knew at least one or two graduates who had secured formal jobs due to the skills they had acquired from online learning platforms. 155 respondents (71.1%) reported that they knew at least one or two of such, 46 respondents (21%) did not know of such, while 17 (7.8%) were undecided.

Shifting from formal employment to entrepreneurship, we asked respondents whether they thought that the contents taught on online learning platforms can help Nigerian entrepreneurs who are not interested in formal jobs to be very successful in their entrepreneurial endeavours? 197 participants (90%) stated that online learning platforms can enhance the success of entrepreneurs. Only 9 participants (4.1%) did not agree, while 12 participants (5.5%) were not sure whether or not the success of entrepreneurial activities could be enhanced by digital learning. Moving from the general to the specific, we asked our participants whether they knew at least one or two graduates who had established their own businesses based on knowledge and skills acquired from online learning platforms? 160 participants (73%) claimed yes, 36 participants (16.5%) reported no, while 22 participants (10%) neither agreed nor disagreed

To test whether our respondents considered that the online courses could make them competitive on international labour markets, we asked them whether they thought that graduates who had developed themselves through online learning platforms have the capacity to secure jobs abroad? 183 participants (84%) claimed yes, 8 participants (4%) reported no, while 27 participants (12%) neither agreed nor disagreed. When asked if they know at least one or two graduates who had developed themselves through online learning platforms and subsequently secured jobs abroad, 133 participants (61%) claimed yes, 67 participants (31%) reported no, while 18 participants (8%) neither agreed nor disagreed.

What can lecturers in HEIs learn from the approaches adopted by training facilitators on digital coaching platforms and how they can integrate such into their educational programmes?

When we asked our respondents which approaches university lecturers could adopt from digital coaching platforms, 44% pointed to interactivity and practical demonstration. 18% mentioned the accessibility of resources, and 14% considered personification to meet individual student needs an approach that could be integrated into education programmes at Nigerian HEIs. 12% mentioned motivation and emotional support for students, whereas 11% added feedback and assessment from students.

Invited to suggest ways of improving the current educational system in Nigeria, so that graduates can be more employable, the following suggestions were received:

- (1) Enhance the curriculum: Update and revise the curriculum to align with the evolving needs of the job market. Incorporate practical, hands-on learning experiences and real-world applications to develop skills that are in demand by employers. Introduce entrepreneurship and critical thinking courses to foster creativity and problem-solving abilities.
 - (2) Focus on vocational training: Promote vocational and technical education alongside traditional academic pathways. Develop programmes that provide practical skills in areas such as information technology, agriculture, healthcare, and skilled trades. Collaborate with industries to design curricula that match market demands and offer internships or apprenticeships for practical experience.
 - (3) Teacher training and development: Invest in professional development programmes for teachers to improve their teaching methodologies and subject knowledge. Encourage continuous learning and provide resources to keep up with current trends in education. Emphasise pedagogical approaches that foster critical thinking, creativity, and practical application.
 - (4) Industry-academia collaboration: Foster stronger ties between educational institutions and industries. Encourage collaboration through partnerships, internships, and research projects. Involve industry experts in curriculum development, guest lectures, and workshops to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical skills.
 - (5) Modernise infrastructure and technology: Invest in modern educational infrastructure, including well-equipped laboratories, libraries, and technology resources. Ensure access to up-to-date technology and internet connectivity to facilitate e-learning and digital literacy. Integrate technology into teaching practices and provide training for both teachers and students to effectively utilise educational tools.
- Finally, (6) Government support and funding: Allocate adequate resources and funding to improve the educational infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum development. Create policies that support innovation, research, and development in education. Implement long-term strategies and reforms to ensure sustainability and continuity in improving the educational system. Implementing these suggestions requires a collaborative effort involving the government, educational institutions, industries, and other stakeholders. It is essential to prioritise the holistic development of students, focusing not only on academic excellence but also on practical skills, entrepreneurship, and adaptability to meet the demands of the evolving job market.

Discussion of Findings

The research findings shed light on several aspects related to digital coaching platforms and their impact on graduates and entrepreneurs in South West Nigeria. Objective one focused on the experiences of graduates and entrepreneurs with digital coaching platforms. The findings revealed that a significant majority (67.9%) of respondents had used digital platforms to acquire new skills for their work. Additionally, the study identified technical skills (40%), leadership and management skills (28%), and communication and problem-solving skills (16%) as the key areas where participants reported

acquiring knowledge from these platforms. However, respondents also faced challenges when using digital coaching platforms. Poor network connectivity and inadequate power supply, high cost of data and financial constraints, emerged as the major obstacles, which highlights the need for improved internet and electricity infrastructure in the Africa. Other challenges included fear of scams and exposure to spam, distraction and inadequate digital suggesting the importance of promoting digital literacy and ensuring a safe online learning environment in Africa.

Objective two examined the functionality of digital coaching platforms in employability skill acquisition. Lack of job opportunities (31%) and corruption, favouritism, and nepotism (29%) were identified as the major causes of unemployment according to the respondents. It is surprising to note therefore that although most respondents did not identify lack of skills as a key driver of persistent unemployment, they nevertheless agreed that digital coaching can play a role in enhancing their employability. 80% of participants indicated that online learning platforms have the capacity to increase employability prospects and entrepreneurial capacity in Africa. This emphasises the potential of digital coaching platforms in addressing unemployment challenges by equipping graduates with relevant skills. The study further revealed that digital coaching platforms were considered effective in helping Nigerian graduates develop skills and competencies for their desired jobs (52.8%). Additionally, a significant number of respondents (71.1%) knew at least one or two graduates who had secured formal jobs through skills acquired from online learning platforms. These findings suggest that digital coaching platforms have the potential to enhance employability and job prospects for graduates in Africa.

Objective three focused on the lessons that lecturers in HEIs can learn from the approaches used by training facilitators on digital coaching platforms. The suggestions provided by the respondents suggest enhancements to the curriculum, a focus on vocational training, provide teacher training and development, strengthen career guidance and counselling services, foster industry-academia collaboration, modernise infrastructure and technology, revise assessment methods, offer entrepreneurship and job readiness programmes, encourage industry certification and accreditation, and allocate government support and funding. Implementing these suggestions would help bridge the gap between academia and industry, align educational programmes with market demands, and improve graduates' employability.

Overall, the research highlights the positive impact of digital coaching platforms in acquiring relevant skills for the job market. With the majority of respondents acknowledging the effectiveness of these platforms and knowing graduates who have secured formal jobs through online learning, there is an indication that digital coaching platforms can play a crucial role in reducing unemployment rates in the continent. To leverage these platforms effectively, improving internet connectivity and addressing challenges such as scams and inadequate IT skills are essential.

Summary conclusion and recommendations

The research explored experiences with digital coaching platforms and the possible impact of such platforms on employability and the employability gap in Africa, using South West Nigeria as a case study. In conclusion, the findings of this research record the increasing popularity and relevance of digital coaching platforms among graduates and entrepreneurs in Africa. The findings revealed that

these platforms offer opportunities for individuals to acquire new skills and competencies that are vital for securing formal employment and improving the entrepreneurial capabilities of respondents. However, challenges related to network connectivity, inadequate power supply, high cost of digital tools and data cost need to be addressed to ensure a more effective learning environment. The study also suggest potential for educational reforms within HEIs, including curriculum enhancements, vocational training, teacher development, career guidance services, industry-academia collaboration, and infrastructure modernisation.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings presented above, the following recommendations can be made: Firstly, given the positive experiences reported by respondents and the skills acquired from digital coaching platforms, it is recommended to encourage the use of these platforms among graduates and entrepreneurs. Educational institutions can integrate digital coaching platforms into their programmes and provide guidance and resources to facilitate their effective use. Secondly, poor network connectivity, lack of adequate power supply, high cost of data, exposure to scam (fraud), too many distractions and inadequate digital skills was identified as a major challenge faced by respondents. To address this issue, it is crucial for governments and other stakeholders to invest in improving internet and power infrastructure, provide subsidies for data. Thirdly, inadequate IT skills and fear of scams (fraud) were mentioned as a challenge by respondents. It is important to provide training and support to develop digital literacy and IT skills among graduates and also ensure a safe online learning environment. This can be achieved through workshops, courses, and resources focused on building essential digital skills and providing adequate awareness about the tactics of online fraudsters. Fourthly, the continued need to enhance the higher education curriculum to align with the evolving needs of the job market, incorporating some of the approaches used by the facilitators of digital coaching platforms. Implementing these recommendations requires a collaborative effort involving educational institutions, government bodies, industries, and other stakeholders.

Suggestion for further studies

While this research provides insights into the experiences and impact of digital coaching platforms in Africa, there are several avenues for further investigation. Future studies could delve deeper into the specific types of digital coaching platforms preferred by graduates and entrepreneurs and explore their effectiveness in different fields and industries. Additionally, research could focus on the long-term impact of skills acquired through digital coaching platforms on individuals' career progression and job satisfaction. Moreover, comparative studies across different regions in Africa or other continents would provide a broader perspective on the benefits and challenges of digital coaching platforms. Lastly, exploring the perceptions and experiences of employers regarding the drivers of unemployment and skills gained from online learning platforms would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of African job markets. Conducting these studies would provide valuable insights for

policymakers and educators enabling them to make informed decisions and enhance the efficacy of digital coaching platforms in promoting employability.

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