

Labour Market Trends and Employer Expectations

By

Prof. Malami Muhammad Maishanu
Department of Business Administration
Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto

A Paper Presented at a Training Programme Organised for Deans of UDUS by
the Career Service Centre on 10th February 2026 at Centre for Advance
Science Research and Analytical Services (CASRAS)

1.1 Introduction

The employment market is changing quickly due to several factors, including globalisation, demographic shifts, technological innovation, and shifting employer expectations. These advances are affecting the skills and attributes that graduates around the world need. The challenge for Nigerian universities, and particularly Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto (UDUS), is to stay up to date with these global trends while also adapting to the particular conditions of the local and national employment market.

Recognizing these challenges, the National Universities Commission (NUC) has underscored the importance of career guidance and counselling in preparing graduates for employability, entrepreneurship, and lifelong learning. Similarly, the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) has prioritized employability and



career readiness in its interventions, funding career centres, entrepreneurship hubs, and training programs across Nigerian universities. These national directives highlight that career guidance is no longer optional but a strategic necessity for universities.

For UDUS, this workshop shows the university's commitment in aligning with NUC and TETFund priorities while addressing regional development needs. By convening deans and academic leaders, the university demonstrates its resolve to embed career counselling, employability skills, and industry linkages into academic programmes. This is not only about compliance with national standards but about positioning UDUS graduates to thrive in a competitive labour market, contribute to regional modernization, and drive Nigeria's socio-economic transformation.

As one of Nigeria's top universities in the North-West, UDUS is essential in generating graduates who support the socioeconomic advancement of Sokoto State, the larger northern area, and the nation as a whole. The institution is well-positioned to meet important labour market demands because of its varied academic offerings, which range from agriculture and health sciences to law, education, and the humanities. But to keep UDUS graduates competitive, flexible, and prepared for the future, a calculated approach is required due to the quick speed of change.

Several factors make this alignment urgent: High youth unemployment and underemployment in Nigeria, which underscores the need for universities to equip students with both employability and entrepreneurial skills. Second, emerging sectors in the Nigerian economy, such as ICT, renewable energy, agribusiness, and healthcare, require specialised technical expertise and innovation. Third, employer expectations, which increasingly emphasise soft skills such as



communication, teamwork, adaptability, etc., alongside technical competence. Fourth, regional development priorities, where UDUS can serve as a catalyst for addressing local challenges such as agricultural modernisation, healthcare delivery, and public sector efficiency.

This paper therefore explores global and national labour market trends, employer expectations, and their implications for UDUS. It argues that by modernising curricula, strengthening industry partnerships, and embedding employability skills across disciplines, UDUS can ensure its graduates thrive in a competitive and dynamic environment. The goal is to provide actionable insights for UDUS leadership to align academic programmes with labour market realities, thereby enhancing the university's impact on both local and global scales.

1.2 Global Labour Market Trends

Several significant factors are changing the global labour market, which directly affects universities all over the world, including Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto (UDUS). Aligning academic programmes with the realities of the workplace in the twenty-first century requires an understanding of these influences.

a. Technological Advancements and Automation

Digital platforms, automation, and artificial intelligence are changing the nature of work in several industries. As new opportunities arise in fields like data science, machine learning, and digital health, routine work is becoming more and more automated (World Economic Forum, 2025). Digital literacy, coding, and data analysis must be included in Nigerian university curricula. For instance, medical



students can be exposed to telemedicine techniques, and agriculture students might learn about precision farming technologies.

b. Rise of the Gig Economy

Globally, platform-based employment, contract labour, and freelancing are all growing. Employees must be self-motivated, enterprising, and flexible enough to work on short-term projects. Incorporating project-based learning and entrepreneurship training helps equip graduates to succeed in flexible work schedules. Students should be introduced to digital marketplaces and freelance platforms through career services.

c. Globalisation and Remote Work

Digital communication technology has advanced chances for remote work and cross-border collaboration. Graduates who can manage virtual collaboration and operate well in multicultural teams are now highly valued by employers (World Economic Forum, 2025). As a result, emphasis should be placed on intercultural communication, language competency, and remote teamwork abilities. To expose students to worldwide work methods, Nigerian universities should also deepen their collaborations with foreign organisations.

d. Demand for Digital and Green Skills

Proficiency in data analytics, cybersecurity, renewable energy, and sustainable practices is becoming more and more sought after by employers. New positions in energy management, environmental policy, and sustainable business are being created by the shift to a green economy (International Labour Organization, 2024). Digital skills and sustainability should be incorporated into scientific,



engineering, and social science curricula. For example, giving electives on environmental governance or incorporating renewable energy modules into engineering curricula might position university graduates as leaders in Nigeria's green transition.

1.3 National and Regional Labour Market Context

While global labour market trends set the broad direction, Nigeria's labour market presents unique challenges and opportunities that directly affect UDUS graduates. Understanding these dynamics is essential for tailoring academic programmes to national realities and regional development priorities.

i. Youth Unemployment and Underemployment

Nigeria faces persistently high youth unemployment, with many graduates unable to secure jobs that match their qualifications. Underemployment is also widespread, as graduates often accept roles below their skill level. In Q2 2024, unemployment stood at 4.3%, while underemployment was 9.2% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). With 58% of Nigeria's population under 30, the youth bulge intensifies pressure on universities to prepare employable graduates (World Bank, 2024). UDUS must prioritise employability training, entrepreneurship education, and career guidance to ensure graduates can create opportunities and adapt to diverse employment pathways.

ii. Sectoral Growth Areas

Rapid growth in ICT, agriculture, healthcare, and renewable energy is creating many job possibilities (World Bank, 2024). UDUS can leverage its strengths in



agriculture, health sciences, and social sciences to align programmes with these growth areas while expanding ICT and engineering offerings.

- **ICT and Digital Economy:** Nigeria's tech hubs (e.g., Lagos, Abuja, and Kano) are driving demand for software developers, data analysts, and cybersecurity experts.
- **Agriculture and Agribusiness:** As a key sector in Sokoto and the wider Northwest, modernised agriculture offers opportunities in value chains, processing, and agritech.
- **Healthcare:** Growing demand for medical professionals, public health experts, and digital health solutions.
- **Renewable Energy:** Nigeria's push for sustainable energy creates roles in solar technology, energy management, and environmental policy.

UDUS can leverage its strengths in agriculture, health sciences, and social sciences to align programmes with these growth areas while expanding ICT and engineering offerings.

iii. Education-Labour Market Mismatch

Curricula in many Nigerian universities lag behind industry needs, leading to skill gaps among graduates. Employers often report deficiencies in practical skills, problem-solving, and workplace readiness (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024). Regular curriculum reviews, especially of the 30% local content, industry input, and experiential learning (internships, fieldwork, and projects), are critical to bridging this gap.



iv. Regional Development Priorities

Sokoto State and the wider North-West region face specific socio-economic challenges, including agricultural modernisation, healthcare delivery, and public sector efficiency. UDUS, as the region's flagship university, has a responsibility to produce graduates who can address these priorities. Programmes should integrate regional development goals, encouraging students to apply their skills to local challenges while remaining globally competitive.

1.4 Employer Expectations

Across Nigeria, employers consistently emphasise a blend of technical competence, soft skills, and professional values. For UDUS graduates, meeting these expectations is essential to securing meaningful employment and contributing to regional development.

a). Core Technical Skills

Employers expect graduates to demonstrate mastery of discipline-specific knowledge and practical skills. ICT firms seek coding, data analytics, and cybersecurity expertise; healthcare providers demand clinical competence and digital health literacy; agribusinesses require knowledge of modern farming techniques and value chain management (Jobberman Nigeria, 2024). Faculties in UDUS must embed practical training, laboratory work, and industry-standard tools into curricula. For example, agriculture students should gain exposure to mechanised farming, while law students should practise with digital legal research platforms.



b). Soft Skills

Employers increasingly value interpersonal and transferable skills such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability. These are often cited as critical gaps among Nigerian graduates (PwC Nigeria, 2024).

- **Communication:** Clear written and oral communication is vital in both local and international contexts.
- **Teamwork and Collaboration:** Ability to work effectively in diverse teams, including remote and cross-cultural settings.
- **Adaptability and Resilience:** Flexibility to navigate uncertainty and changing work environments.

Soft skills training should be integrated into coursework, group projects, and extracurricular activities. Career services can also run workshops on workplace communication and leadership.

c). Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving

Employers want graduates who can analyse complex issues, generate solutions, and make sound decisions (Jobberman Nigeria, 2024). Therefore, teaching methods should emphasise inquiry-based learning, case studies, and applied research projects that mirror real-world challenges in Sokoto and Nigeria.

d). Continuous Learning and Upskilling

The pace of technological change requires graduates to be lifelong learners. Employers value individuals who can acquire new skills quickly and adapt to emerging fields (PwC Nigeria, 2024). Embedding digital platforms for self-



learning, encouraging professional certifications, and promoting postgraduate opportunities will help graduates remain competitive.

e). Ethical Standards and Professionalism

Employers stress integrity, accountability, and ethical conduct as non-negotiable qualities (PwC Nigeria, 2024). In UDUS, therefore, courses should integrate ethics and civic responsibility, while mentorship programmes can reinforce professionalism. As a university with a strong cultural and religious heritage, UDUS is uniquely positioned to instill values of honesty, service, and community responsibility.

1.5 Implications for Universities

The evolving labour market and employer expectations present both challenges and opportunities for Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto (UDUS). To remain relevant and impactful, UDUS must adapt its academic, administrative, and student development strategies in the following ways:

i. Curriculum Review and Modernisation

Employers demand graduates with up-to-date technical and soft skills, but universities must work within the framework of the National Universities Commission (NUC) CCMAS. UDUS can achieve this by strategically using the 30% university-level content allowance to tailor programmes to emerging labour market needs. UDUS should:

- Leverage CCMAS. Flexibility:



- Use the 30% local content provision to integrate emerging technologies such as AI, data analytics, renewable energy, and agritech into existing programmes. Agriculture students for instance could take electives in precision farming and drone technology; health sciences students could learn telemedicine applications.
- Embed Soft Skills Across Faculties:
 - Incorporate communication, teamwork, and adaptability modules into the 30% local content. Employability workshops can be embedded into its CCMAS-compliant curriculum, across faculties.
- Introduce Interdisciplinary Modules:
 - Design cross-faculty electives that connect agriculture, ICT, health sciences, and social sciences. For e.g. Ahmadu Bello University introduced "ICT in Agriculture" as a local content elective, producing graduates who can lead agritech startups. UDUS can adopt similar interdisciplinary modules.
- Continuous Curriculum Review:
 - Establish a Curriculum Innovation Committee that reviews CCMAS compliance periodically, while ensuring alignment with regional development priorities. Covenant University regularly updates its CCMAS-compliant programmes with industry input, ensuring graduates remain competitive in ICT and business.



ii. Strengthening Industry-Academia Partnerships

Employers want graduates with practical experience and industry exposure. UDUS can achieve this by moving beyond informal collaborations to structured, mutually beneficial partnerships through the following ways.

- **Formal Partnerships with Sokoto-Based Industries**
 - Sign Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with agribusiness cooperatives, hospitals, and ICT firms in Sokoto. *Ahmadu Bello University (ABU)* partnered with Kaduna agribusiness firms to provide structured internships; many students transitioned directly into full-time roles. UDUS can replicate this with Sokoto's tomato processing plants and dairy cooperatives.
- **Create Advisory Boards with Industry Leaders**
 - Establish faculty-level advisory boards that include representatives from governments' healthcare institutions, ICT startups, and agricultural enterprises. These boards can review curricula annually to ensure alignment with industry needs.
- **Expand Internship and Apprenticeship Opportunities**
 - Make internships compulsory across all faculties, using the NUC's CCMAS 30% local content flexibility to embed them into programmes. UDUS can partner with the Sokoto State Ministry of Health to place medical students in rural clinics as well as ICT hubs for computer science students. The *University of Lagos* collaborates with Jobberman to connect students to internships nationwide. UDUS could partner with Jobberman or the Sokoto Chamber of Commerce to expand opportunities.



- **Launch Joint Research and Innovation Projects**

- Encourage faculty and students to co-develop solutions with industry – e.g., renewable energy projects with Sokoto solar firms and agritech innovations with local cooperatives. Example, the *University of Ibadan's innovation hub* incubated startups in health tech and agritech, some of which attracted external funding. UDUS can establish a similar hub focused on Sokoto's regional priorities.

iii. Enhancing Career Services and Employability Programmes

Graduates often struggle with job placement and career readiness. While CCMAS sets the minimum academic standards, UDUS can use the **30% local content flexibility** to embed employability training into programmes and strengthen career services by:

- **Developing a Robust Career Services Centre**

- Establish a dedicated unit that offers CV clinics, mock interviews, and career counselling. The *Pan-Atlantic University* runs structured CV clinics and interview prep sessions, leading to higher graduate employability. UDUS can replicate this by embedding career readiness workshops into the 30% local content.

- **Organising Annual Career Fairs**

- Partner with the Sokoto Chamber of Commerce, local hospitals, agribusinesses, and ICT firms to host career fairs. For example, the *University of Lagos* collaborates with Jobberman to host career fairs that connect students directly with employers nationwide.



UDUS can adapt this model to connect students with Sokoto-based industries and national firms.

- **Providing Training on Freelancing and Digital Entrepreneurship**
 - Offer short courses on freelancing platforms (Upwork, Fiverr) and digital entrepreneurship as electives. *Covenant University* introduced entrepreneurship modules that helped graduates launch startups in ICT and agribusiness. UDUS can replicate this by embedding freelancing and entrepreneurship training into its CCMAS-compliant curriculum.
- **Through Alumni Engagement for Mentorship and Networking**
 - Launch an alumni mentorship programme where successful UDUS graduates guide current students. E.g. the *Ahmadu Bello University* uses alumni networks to connect students with industry mentors. UDUS can formalise alumni mentorship to strengthen career pathways.
- **Tracking Graduate Outcomes**
 - Establish a Graduate Employability Survey to monitor where UDUS graduates are employed, underemployed, or pursuing entrepreneurship. The *University of Ibadan* tracks graduate outcomes to refine its programmes. UDUS can use similar data to adjust its 30% local content for maximum impact.

iv. Promoting Entrepreneurship and Innovation

With limited formal jobs, graduates must be empowered to create opportunities. The NUC's CCMAS framework allows UDUS to use the **30% local content**



flexibility to embed entrepreneurship and innovation training into programmes. Thus UDUS should:

- **Establish Innovation Hubs and Incubators**
 - Create a UDUS Innovation Hub where students can develop business ideas, access mentorship, and pitch to investors. For e.g. the *University of Ibadan's Innovation Hub* incubated startups in health tech and agritech, some of which attracted external funding. UDUS can replicate this by focusing on agritech and renewable energy solutions for Sokoto.
- **Offer Seed Funding and Mentorship for Student Startups**
 - Partner with the Sokoto State Government, local banks, and NGOs to provide small grants for student-led ventures. Example: *Covenant University's Centre for Entrepreneurship* provides seed funding and mentorship, producing graduates who launched successful ICT and agribusiness startups. UDUS can adapt this model to support ventures in agriculture and healthcare.
- **Integrate Entrepreneurship Courses Across Disciplines**
 - Use CCMAS's 30% local content to embed entrepreneurship modules into non-business programmes. The *University of Agriculture, Makurdi*, integrated agribusiness entrepreneurship into its agriculture curriculum, producing graduates who now run commercial farms. UDUS can embed similar modules in agriculture, health sciences, and ICT.
- **Promote Hackathons and Competitions**
 - Organise annual hackathons and innovation challenges where students propose solutions to Sokoto's regional problems (e.g.,



irrigation, healthcare delivery, renewable energy). Example: *Ahmadu Bello University* hosts agritech competitions that connect students with investors. UDUS can replicate this to attract funding and industry partnerships.

v. Leveraging UDUS's Regional Role

Sokoto State and the wider North-West region face specific socio-economic challenges, including agricultural modernisation, healthcare delivery, and public sector efficiency. UDUS, as the region's flagship university, can use the **30% CCMAS local content flexibility** to embed regional priorities into its programmes through:

- **Agricultural Modernisation**

- Introduce electives on irrigation technology, mechanised farming, and agribusiness management.
- Partner with Sokoto's tomato processing plants, dairy cooperatives, and poultry farms to provide hands-on training.
- *Success Story: The University of Agriculture, Makurdi*, aligned its curriculum with regional farming needs, producing graduates who now run commercial farms. UDUS can replicate this by tailoring agriculture programmes to Sokoto's modernisation agenda.

- **Healthcare Delivery**

- Embed community health modules into medical and nursing programmes, focusing on rural healthcare challenges.
- Partner with the Sokoto State Ministry of Health to place students in rural clinics for practical exposure.



- *Success Story: Ahmadu Bello University Teaching Hospital* collaborates with Kaduna State to train medical students in underserved communities. UDUS can adopt this model to strengthen healthcare delivery in Sokoto.
- **Public Sector Efficiency**
 - Introduce electives on governance, public administration, and digital record-keeping within social sciences.
 - Partner with the Sokoto State Government to provide internships in ministries and local government councils.
 - *Success Story: University of Lagos* runs governance-focused internships with Lagos State Government, giving students practical exposure to public administration. UDUS can replicate this with Sokoto's civil service.
- **Applied Research for Local Challenges**
 - Encourage faculty and students to conduct research on water management, food security, and renewable energy solutions tailored to Sokoto's environment.
 - *Success Story: University of Ibadan's applied research projects* in public health influenced state-level policy. UDUS can similarly drive evidence-based solutions for Sokoto's socio-economic issues.

1.6 Recommendations

To align with global labour market trends, national realities, and employer expectations, UDUS leadership should adopt the following strategic actions:



Institutionalise Curriculum Innovation within CCMAS

- Establish a *Curriculum Innovation Committee* mandated to use the 30% CCMAS local content for emerging technologies, soft skills, and interdisciplinary modules. Benchmark against success stories like *Covenant University's ICT integration* and *University of Agriculture, Makurdi's agribusiness electives*.

Formalise Industry Partnerships at the University Level

- Sign MoUs with agribusinesses, hospitals, and ICT firms in Sokoto for internships, apprenticeships, and joint research.
- Create *Faculty Advisory Boards* with industry leaders to guide programme design.

Strengthen Career Services as a Central Unit

- Expand the *Career Services Centre* with dedicated staff, annual career fairs, and alumni mentorship programmes.
- Partner with *Jobberman Nigeria* or the Sokoto Chamber of Commerce to connect students with employers.

Establish a UDUS Innovation & Entrepreneurship Hub.

- Provide seed funding, mentorship, and incubation for student startups.
- Focus on agritech, renewable energy, and healthcare innovations relevant to Sokoto and neighbouring states.

Align Programmes with Regional Development Agenda

- Tailor agriculture programmes to irrigation and mechanization needs.
- Expand healthcare training for rural health delivery.



- Introduce governance and public administration electives to strengthen civil service efficiency.

Monitor and Evaluate Graduate Outcomes

- Launch a *Graduate Employability Survey* to track employment, entrepreneurship, and underemployment.
- Use findings to continuously refine the 30% local content and partnerships.

1.7 Conclusion

The labour market is evolving at an unprecedented pace, driven by technological innovation, globalisation, and shifting employer expectations. For Nigeria, and particularly for Usmanu Danfodiyo University Sokoto (UDUS), these changes present both challenges and opportunities. Graduates must be equipped not only with technical expertise but also with soft skills, adaptability, and ethical grounding to thrive in a competitive environment.

UDUS, as a flagship institution in the North-West, has a unique responsibility to prepare graduates who can contribute meaningfully to national development while addressing regional priorities such as agricultural modernisation, healthcare delivery, and public sector efficiency. By modernising curricula, strengthening industry partnerships, embedding employability skills, and promoting entrepreneurship, UDUS can position itself as a leader in producing future-ready graduates.



UDUS leadership should therefore:

- Champion reforms that align academic programmes with labour market realities.
- Invest in innovation and partnerships that connect students to industry and global opportunities.
- Empower graduates to be not only job seekers but also job creators, innovators, and community leaders.

References

International Labour Organization. (2024). *World employment and social outlook: Trends 2024*. Geneva: ILO.

Jobberman Nigeria. (2024). *The skills mismatch in Nigeria: Employer perspectives and workforce readiness*. Lagos: Jobberman Research.

National Bureau of Statistics. (2024). *Labour force statistics: Unemployment and underemployment report (Q2 2024)*. Abuja: NBS.

PwC Nigeria. (2024). *Workforce of the future: Employer expectations in Nigeria*. Lagos: PricewaterhouseCoopers.

World Economic Forum. (2025). *The future of jobs report 2025*. Geneva: WEF.

World Bank. (2024). *Nigeria development update: Strengthening economic resilience*. Washington, DC: World Bank Group.

