

Opinion Editorial



Nigeria Does Not Lack Talent. It Lacks Transition Infrastructure.



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Africa has expanded access to learning, but the systems required to transition young people into practical workforce readiness remain dangerously underdeveloped.

Recent conversations around employability, hiring standards and the shortage of “quality hands” in Nigeria have once again brought national attention to an uncomfortable reality within the country’s workforce ecosystem. Across industries, employers continue to express concerns about finding work-ready talent, while at the same time millions of young Nigerians remain unemployed, underemployed or struggling to secure meaningful opportunities.

The contradiction is difficult to ignore. How can a country with one of the world’s youngest and most energetic populations simultaneously face both rising youth unemployment and growing concerns about employability?

The answer may lie in how we understand the problem itself.

Over the past decade, access to learning has expanded dramatically. Young Nigerians today have more access to digital education, online courses, bootcamps, certifications and technical training than any previous generation. Yet many employers still argue that technical knowledge alone is not translating into workplace readiness at the scale the economy requires.

But beneath these conversations lies a deeper structural issue.

The debate around employability in Nigeria is often reduced to a simplistic binary. On one side are employers frustrated by the difficulty of finding work-ready talent. On the other are young people who feel increasingly excluded from opportunities despite investing heavily in education, digital learning and self-development. The reality is more nuanced than either side often admits.



Nigeria's employability crisis is not primarily a talent problem. It is a transition problem. Many young people have acquired skills, but lack enough structured pathways that convert learning into real-world experience and potential into employability.

In many cases, the gap is not intelligence or ambition. It is exposure.

As millions of Africans continue to learn online, it is important to note that learning in isolation is very different from operating within structured environments that demand accountability, execution under pressure, contributing within teams, navigating deadlines, communicating ideas clearly and solving problems. These capabilities are often developed through repeated practical engagement rather than theory alone.

The modern workplace increasingly rewards applied competence rather than theoretical familiarity alone. Employers are not simply searching for people who have learned tools. They are searching for people who can apply knowledge effectively within real-world systems.

That distinction matters enormously.

Across Africa, access to learning has expanded at an extraordinary pace. From Google's digital skills initiatives to Coursera, LinkedIn Learning, bootcamps, tech communities and local training programmes, millions of young Africans now have access to knowledge and technical education in ways that were previously unimaginable.

This progress matters. It reflects a generation actively investing in self-development, digital skills and economic participation despite difficult realities. But access to learning is not the same as access to employability.



Across much of the continent, learning ecosystems have expanded faster than experience ecosystems. Young people are increasingly learning while attempting to enter workplaces that expect collaboration, problem-solving, adaptability and practical execution from day one.

The missing layer is what can best be described as transition systems: structured systems that help people move from knowledge acquisition to real-world competence. These systems include internships, apprenticeships, mentorship, supervised project work, workplace simulations, portfolio development, and environments where people can repeatedly apply what they know under guidance and accountability.

Without these pathways, many young people remain trapped between learning and earning technically exposed, but professionally underprepared.

As the global workforce becomes increasingly shaped by AI, automation, and remote competition, this gap may become even more significant.

This reality became even clearer to us through Greydient, a virtual internship and work-readiness initiative designed around a simple idea: the bridge between learning and earning must be intentional.

When we launched our first cohort, we received applications from multiple cities across Nigeria as well as interest from other African countries. What stood out immediately was that many participants were not simply searching for another course or certification. They were searching for exposure, structure, mentorship, portfolio development and opportunities to apply what they already knew in practical environments.



Many participants demonstrated curiosity, intelligence and a genuine willingness to grow. But our mentors also observed recurring gaps that extended beyond technical skills alone. Some participants struggled with professional communication, consistency, time management, collaborative workflows and execution within structured environments.

In many cases, the issue was not the absence of talent, but the absence of exposure.

Encouragingly, we also observed that many of these gaps began to narrow once participants were placed within structured project environments that demanded collaboration, execution, communication, and accountability. Confidence improved. Portfolio quality improved. Workplace readiness improved.

Potential often becomes visible only after people are given environments where it can be tested, refined, and supported. The urgency of this challenge is likely to grow even more over the coming years.

Artificial intelligence, automation, and remote work are already reshaping the global workforce in profound ways. Across industries, employers are increasingly prioritising adaptability, analytical thinking, communication, collaboration, creativity, and problem-solving alongside technical competence. The future of work is becoming less about access to information and more about the ability to apply knowledge effectively within fast-changing environments.

This shift is especially important for young Africans entering the digital economy.

A decade ago, acquiring technical skills alone could significantly improve access to opportunity. Today, that threshold is rising. Young people are no longer competing only within local labour markets.



They are increasingly competing globally in remote and digital work ecosystems where execution, reliability, communication and practical experience matter deeply.

At the same time, AI is beginning to automate many repetitive entry-level tasks that once served as traditional entry points into the workforce. This means the ability to think critically, adapt quickly, collaborate effectively and contribute within structured systems may become even more valuable in the years ahead.

The employability conversation in Africa can therefore no longer focus only on learning. It must increasingly focus on transition, practical readiness and the systems required to help people move from knowledge acquisition to meaningful contribution.

Addressing this challenge will require a shift in how we think about workforce development across Africa.

For years, much of the focus has been placed on expanding access to learning and digital skills. That investment remains important. But the next phase of workforce development must focus more intentionally on transition systems: the structures that help people convert knowledge into practical competence and workplace readiness.

Interestingly, many large organisations already understand this principle. Banks, consulting firms, multinational companies, and other major employers often invest heavily in graduate trainee programmes designed to transition young graduates into structured professional environments before expecting full performance. These programmes recognise an important reality: employability is not developed through education alone, but through guided exposure, mentorship, accountability and practical execution.

The challenge is that these structured transition opportunities remain inaccessible to millions of young people across the continent.



Africa will likely need far more internships, apprenticeships, project-based learning environments, digital work simulations, mentorship ecosystems, and employer-supported talent pipelines capable of operating at scale. Educational institutions, private companies, startups, governments, and digital learning platforms all have a role to play in building these bridges between learning and earning.

Because in the future economy, the ecosystems that thrive may not necessarily be those producing the highest number of certificates, but those building the strongest bridges between potential and contribution.

About Greydient

Greydient is a virtual internship and workforce readiness platform designed to help young Africans transition from learning to earning through practical, experience-based digital training.

Instead of focusing only on theoretical learning, Greydient combines structured virtual internships, real-world projects, mentorship, collaboration and career readiness support to help participants build practical skills and professional confidence.

About Segun Abodunrin

Segun Abodunrin is the Principal Skills Professor at Greydient, a global virtual internship platform helping young Africans gain practical experience, build professional portfolios and become work-ready.

A technology entrepreneur with over 15 years of experience, he has led digital transformation projects, conducted large-scale research initiatives and trained thousands of young people in digital skills. His current work focuses on bridging the gap between learning and earning across Africa.



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