

Evaluating Basic Skills Acquired by Graduating Students in Public Universities in Rivers State

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Abstract: This study investigated how basic skills can be acquired for job creation of university graduates in Rivers State, Nigeria. Two objectives were stated, two research questions guided the study and two hypotheses were also tested. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population was 17,628 university graduating students comprising 10,000 male, 7,628 female from the three Universities in Rivers State. A sample of 408 respondents comprising 246 male and 162 female was drawn using stratified random sampling technique. The instrument used to generate data was self-designed questionnaire that has reliability coefficient of 0.82. The data generated were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while z-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that each of the basic skills components such as production skills and agricultural skills can create jobs for university graduating students in Rivers State who practice them economically by having them to either become gainfully employed or self-employed. Based on the findings, conclusion was drawn and the following recommendations among others were made: Government should lay more emphasis on the development and teaching of basic skills as general courses in the Universities. University administrators should monitor and supervise adequately the teaching and learning of basic skills in their various institutions.

Keywords: Basic Skills, University Graduating Students, Job Creation, Rivers State.

I. INTRODUCTION

Generally, education is the single best predictor of skills acquisition and also the hall-mark of a nation's socio-economic development. Educational attainment plays an important role in the start-up of adulthood life of young people because of the increasing need for skills in today's economy. Education at the tertiary level, stands as a critical factor in the knowledge economy to a very large extent, because certain skills acquired at that level determine the manpower requirement of a country as well as labour market outcome. The role of skill acquisition in educational management cannot be over emphasized because it is stated clearly in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) document and blue-print of Universal Basic Education (UBE, 2004) of the need to get students exposed to basic meaningful skills that can drive the economy of a country if practiced, so as to help create jobs for themselves and the society at large.

Nigeria as a country with an increasing population estimated at about 200 million people has an need and demand for basic necessities such as food, shelter, clothing, healthcare, water, infrastructure, social amenities, good sanitary conditions among others. However, the availability of these necessities in adequate composition, proportion, quantity and quality is absent due to the exposure rate of her population hence the menace of unemployment as well as inadequate employment opportunities that will meet up with the accelerated growth rate of graduating youths from the universities per year. A high, skillful level of education generally creates more favorable employment prospects and consequently opens up the possibility for better living conditions for young people (Obeten, 2021).

Basic skills acquisition is seen as the ability to learn and acquire new expertise for personal and economic progress. In fact, it enriches people's understanding of themselves and the world around them. It improves the quality of their lives and leads to broad social benefits to individuals and the society where they live. Skills raises people's productivity, creativity, entrepreneurship promotion and technological innovation advancement (Robert *et al.*, 2014). The strategies adopted by various societies towards skills acquisition had enabled many weak nations to have a way out of the shackles of poverty. One effective instrument for achieving near equality in an economy characterized by a large pool of unskilled and semi-skilled labour, is to provide an opportunity for human capacity building (Dike, 2017). This is possible because it aims at providing adequate skills through training of people at different levels to achieve empowerment and job creation.

For clarity, basic skills can be learnt through formal schooling, vocational centers, innovative/technological training, apprenticeship and so on, where learners are taught under the supervision of someone who already has such skills. Ozofor (2016) explained that basic skills have to do with the ability of an individual to carryout functions or tasks with the objective of an end result in mind given limitations of time and energy. It is worthy to note that training and the acquisition of a skill is not usually carried out by the government alone, but through the efforts of individuals who can decide to develop themselves.

Basic skills are a set of programmes or instructions taught to individuals of society with an aim to do one, two or all of the following: -

- Help sharpen the existing talents in the individual.
- Help the individual recognize the existence of certain abilities
- Help the individual develop the talent and ability for professionalism
- Connect individuals of like minds and abilities together with an aim of inspiring them to learn from each other and improve their skills
- Acquaint individuals with the simple procedures of talent and skill performance.
- To correct known and unknown errors
- To instill professionalism
- To help mold entrepreneurs who will cater for themselves and needs of the economy.

It is on this premise that skill acquisition is expanded (Ekere, 2014).

Asodike (2016) suggested that skills acquisition is a process of obtaining skills through formal instruction or learning. It is a protracted form of learning about a group of activities. Since learning entails the storing of information (environmental or cognitive information) in memory, skills acquisition involves storing of information concerning a particular skill over a prolonged period of time.

Production skills

Production skills could be seen as the making of goods by hand or by machine that upon completion, the goods/business is sold to consumer/customers to generate daily income. The major aim of production skills is to ensure that technological appreciation would have been activated and sustained, also to lay a foundation for students' entrance into the vocation of their choice (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2013). Production skills is described in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2013) document as an aspect of education which leads to acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. As a vocational subject, it deals with fundamentals of technological advancement with the aim to reduce ignorance in relation to technology and also help lay a solid foundation for true national development, gainful employment as well as income generation. Content embedded in production skills curriculum in Nigeria tertiary institutions encompasses aspects of globalization, information and communication technology alongside entrepreneurship ventures. These skills are very major as they are very crucial in the development of the students, nation building as well as an enigmatic tool to influence positive trends of behaviour of students in a dynamic technological society.

Ribawa (2018) an American sociologists asserted that production skills are manufacturing skilled procedure that includes all tools, machines, utensils, weapons, instruments, housing gargets, textile production, communicating and

transporting devices alongside the skills used in their production and their usage; meaning that all these aforementioned skills can prepare students for financial capacity building. Based on the above exposition, it is very vital to determine the status and relevance of production skills on university graduates. Production skill is one of the pre-vocational subjects aimed at enabling university graduating to live effectively in our modern age of science and technology.

One of the purposes of production skills to individuals in the society is to create a framework for both structural, practical classes and theoretical experiences that will focus on the eradication of poverty, hunger, violence, fears and disease and to create avenues for revenue generation (Ogumisoh, 2018). Furthermore, it also helps in promoting literacy, equality, human rights, sanitation, hygiene, education, physical, mental and social well-being of a people.

Production skills cover areas of economic, social and environmental development which cannot be subtracted from the indices that bind skills being taught in Nigeria universities. Also, these abilities in production skills constitute the work oriented or career-oriented competencies that attempts to improve the efficiency and productivity of its recipients as craftsmen, businessmen and technicians at professional or sub-professional level (Ribana, 2018).

Agricultural skills

The practical skills in agriculture are very important to university graduating students because they learn several ways to efficiently feed a burgeoning population and gain a better understanding of food production, packaging and distribution. University graduating students who are exposed to these skills are fortified with assertive knowledge about agricultural education through the application of scientific and business principles. Promoting problem-solving strategies, explains the interdependency of relationship between the agricultural industry and business world interwoven alongside the entire economic structural intricate of social structure of society (Barkey, 2017).

Agricultural skills focus on the acquisition of skills and studies in horticulture, forest conservation, natural resources, produce and processing, production of food and fiber, aquaculture, mechanized farming, sales and services, packaging as well as leadership development. All these aforementioned skills help to equip university graduates with knowledge of agricultural competency skills that could help them fit into the society and also face challenges if the need arises (Okoneka, 2016).

Atopan (2015) suggested that agricultural skills are internalized because it is an informal skill that can be acquired from the home front as a result of parental interference, involvement and coaching in terms of subsistent farming, meaning that university graduating students, who hail especially from rural areas, must have been taught from home about how to carry out certain agricultural skills as they

helped their parents on their farmlands. Agricultural skill is not only for students to graduate and become just farmers but also to train tomorrow's scientists, nutritionists and teachers. A combination of classroom instruction and applied agricultural experiences outside the classroom builds a foundation for educated consumers and agriculturist (Barkey 2017).

Ogumisoh (2018) explained that civilization started with agriculture which to this day, remains very important and plays a significant role in the lives of humans daily. Today, agricultural skills have widened the horizon/scope; also it encompasses skills such as processing, distribution, marketing of crops and livestock products. Agriculture itself plays an essential role in sustaining and driving the economy. In fact, if university graduating students are taught agricultural skills, they will be able to sustain themselves and their families in terms of food supply/production as well as revenue generation.

Davidson (2015) explained that applying agricultural skills is pivotal in trading because agriculture makes considerable contributions to the economic prosperity of a country. That increase in farming activities can be related to the rise in per capital income of a community or even a nation, with industrialization and urbanization leading to the stark increase in agro-based activities which is often profitable to all. By so doing, acquisition of agricultural skills may result to an increase in agro productivity, paid employee ratio raise multifaceted skills/prowess for commendable recognition in agro-prenuership engagements. By implication, if university graduating students are taught agricultural skills interwovenly with reference to theoretical and practical experiences, they will ultimately achieve the goal of self-reliance and global income input and output establishment.

Graduating students are students who have received a degree or diploma on completion of a course of study at a university, college or school. Graduating students may hold the bachelor's degree or first professional degree. He is a former student and most often a graduate of an educational institution. A graduating student is also likened to a student who is about to leave the university or college on completion of his course of study who once a degree is conferred on him becomes a graduate. He is known as an alumnus or alumni of an educational institution. More often, a student in his/her final year in the university learn a lot of skills especially one that will enable him/her to become self-reliant after school. This is where the agricultural skills and production skills come into play as posited by (Davidson, 2015 & Ribawa, 2018). These vocational and pre-vocational skills are learned by student while in school and sometimes at home before ever they become students. Acquiring the agricultural and production skills help the graduating students become their own boss after school by indulging in any business their acquired skills will afford them. That way, they will improve themselves, their environment and the society at large.

Statement of the problem

It is a known fact that, good skills never come by chance, it is rather a product of effective reasoning, imagination, vision, innovation, inspiration, inventiveness and consistent practice that leads to development of a society. In Rivers State, most university graduating students upon graduation appear to lack self-reliance skills to be able to live independently and also contribute meaningfully to the economy hence the over reliance on white collar jobs, which at present is in short supply thereby giving birth to high rate of unemployment in the country.

There is also this saying that "An idle mind is the devil's workshop". Due to the idle nature of most young university graduates today, there is an increase in unpatriotic behavioural patterns such as prostitution, kidnapping, armed robbery, school truancy, cultism, militancy, oil bunkering, human trafficking, terrorism, drug abuse, rape, pornography, alcohol addiction, gambling (betting), thuggery, gangsterism, assassination internet stealing and so on. These also could be due to lack of basic skills to stimulate them to add value to the education acquired at that level towards economic empowerment leading to job creation (Obeten 2021).

Parents and other educational stakeholders are of the opinion that, the economic environment students found themselves in sometimes affects the students directly or indirectly after graduation. It also appears that, some people have this notion that the basic skill of a thing is an inborn idea rather than perceive it as raw talent that requires total refining for societal use. Again, educational stakeholders are of the opinion that an ideal society should strategically prioritizes in the search for competitiveness under the current conditions of globalization.

Interestingly, some research works carried out in the past revealed that job creation is solely the responsibility of government. It is on this premise that this study was set out to find out how basic skills can be managed for job creation of university graduating students in Rivers State.

Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of this study was to find out how basic skills are managed for job creation of university graduating in Rivers State. Specifically, the objectives of the study include to:

1. Find out the extent production skills are managed for job creation of university graduating in Rivers State.
2. Find out the extent agricultural skills are managed for job creation of university graduating in Rivers State.

Research questions

The following research questions were answered in the study:

1. To what extent are production skills acquired for job creation of university graduating students in Rivers State?

- To what extent are agricultural skills acquired for job creation of student in universities in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female respondents on the extent production skills are acquired for job creation of university graduating students in Rivers State.
- There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female respondents on the extent agricultural skills are acquired for job creation of university graduating students in Rivers State.

II. METHODOLOGY

The design adopted for the study was descriptive survey design. The population of the study consisted of 17,628 university graduating students comprising 10,000 males and 7,628 females from the three (3) public universities in Rivers State. Sample size of 408 respondents which

consisted of 246 males and 162 females was drawn using stratified random sampling technique. 82 males (82 x 3 =246) and 54 females (54 x 3 = 162) students were drawn from the Faculties of Engineering and Agriculture of the three universities. The instrument used for data collection was a 10-item questionnaire titled: Basic Skills for Job Creation of University Graduating Students Questionnaire” (BSJUCGSQ). The instrument was face and content validated by three experts: two from Measurement and Evaluation and one from Educational Management of the University of Port Harcourt. The questionnaire had a reliability coefficient of 0.82 which was estimated using Cronbach alpha statistics. Out of the 420 copies of questionnaires administered, 408 copies which was approximately 97% were retrieved. Research questions raised were answered using mean and standard deviation while z-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results/answer to research questions

Research question 1: To what extent are production skills acquired for job creation of university graduating students in Rivers State?

Table 1: Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Male and Female University Graduating Students on the extent Production Skills are acquired for Job Creation in Rivers State.

S/N	Production skills for job creation of university graduating student.	Male Grad. N = 246		Decision	Female Grad. N = 162		Decision
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁		\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	
1	Production skills impacted in university graduating has prepared them to start their own businesses.	2.86	0.68	Agreed	2.79	0.70	HE
2	University graduating students can produce household items such as soap, detergent, disinfectants to earn their living.	2.73	0.74	Agreed	2.88	0.66	HE
3	Shoe production skills acquired in the university has motivated some graduating students to go into shoe making business on graduation.	2.69	0.76	Agreed	2.74	0.73	HE
4	Furniture/wood work skills acquired in university is enough to enable the graduating student open furniture business if they desire to do.	2.92	0.65	Agreed	2.80	0.69	HE
5	Production skills acquired in the university will help students to be independent/self-employed when they graduate.	2.98	0.62	Agreed	2.94	0.64	HE
	Aggregate mean and standard deviation	2.84	0.69		2.83	0.68	

Table 1 showed that all the items had mean score values that were greater than the criterion mean of 2.50 and they agreed that to a high extent production skills are acquired for job creation of university graduates in Rivers State. The aggregate mean scores of 2.84 for the male and 2.83 for the female university graduating showed that both groups of respondents have a common view that production skills can be acquired for job creation of university graduating in Rivers State.

Therefore, production skills are acquired for job creation of university graduating students in Rivers State in the following ways: Production skills can help university

graduating students to start their own businesses; some university graduating students can produce soap, detergent, disinfectants to earn a living; shoe production skills acquired in the university can motivate some university graduating students to go into shoe making business; furniture/wood work skills acquired in university is very relevant to some people in furniture business and production skills acquired in the university can enable the graduating student to be self-employed and to be independent.

Research question 2: To what extent are agricultural skills acquired for job creation of university graduating students in Rivers State?

Table 2: Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Male and Female University Graduating Students on the extent Agricultural Skills are acquired for Job Creation in Rivers State.

S/N	Agricultural skills for job creation of university graduating Students	Male Grad. N = 246		Decision	Female Grad. N = 162		Decision
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁		\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	
1	Agricultural skills acquired in the university has helped some people to be ready to start small scale poultry business.	2.94	0.64	Agreed	2.92	0.66	HE
2	Agricultural skills helps some people to grow vegetables to boost their income.	2.96	0.63	Agreed	2.98	0.61	HE
3	Agricultural skills impacted in university graduating students have helped make them ready to boost food production.	3.04	0.59	Agreed	3.02	0.60	HE
4	Agricultural skills acquired by university graduating students have made some of them ready to become self-employed and independent.	3.08	0.56	Agreed	3.06	0.57	HE
5	Agricultural skills acquired by university graduating is very relevant in their entrepreneurship/business management.	2.88	0.67	Agreed	2.82	0.69	HE
Aggregate mean and standard deviation		2.98	0.62		2.96	0.63	

Table 2 showed that all the items (1to 5) had mean score values that were greater than the criterion mean of 2.50. They were agreed on by the respondents that to a high extent, agricultural skills are acquired for job creation of university graduating students in Rivers State. The aggregate mean scores of 2.98 and 2.96 for male and female university graduating respectively signifies that both respondents unanimously agreed to a high extent that agricultural skills are acquired for job creation of university graduating in Rivers State.

Therefore, agricultural skills are acquired for job creation of university graduating students in Rivers State in the following ways: agricultural skills has helped some people

to start small scale poultry business; it has helped some people to grow vegetables to boost their income; agricultural skills impacted into university graduating students have helped to boost food security; it has also helped the university graduating students to become self- employed and agricultural skills acquired in the university is very relevant in their entrepreneurship/business endeavour.

Test of hypotheses

Ho1: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female respondents on the extent production skills are acquired for job creation of university graduating students in Rivers State.

Table 3: z-Test of Difference between the Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Male and Female Respondents on the extent Production Skills are acquired for Job Creation of University Graduating Students in Rivers State. N = 408

Gender	N	\bar{X}	Sd	Df	z-cal	z-critical	Level of sign.	Decision
Male	246	2.84	0.69	406	0.145	1.960	0.05	Ho ₁ not significant.
Female	162	2.83	0.68					

*Significant at 0.05 level; df = 406

Results in table 3 showed that the mean scores of male and female respondents stood at 2.84 and 2.83 respectively. A close look at these means score showed that they are closely related and did not differ significantly from each other. Furthermore, at 406 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, the calculated z-score of 0.145 was by far less than the z-table or critical value of ± 1.960 . Hence, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and therefore

established that, there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the male and female respondents on the extent production skills are acquired for job creation of university graduating students in Rivers State.

Ho2: There is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female respondents on the extent agricultural skills are acquired for job creation of university graduating students in Rivers State.

Table 4: z-Test of Difference between the Mean and Standard Deviation Scores of Male and Female Respondents on the extent Agricultural Skills are acquired for job Creation of University Graduating Students in Rivers State. N = 408

Gender	N	\bar{X}	Sd	Df	z-cal	z-critical	Level of sign.	Decision
Male	246	2.98	0.62	406	0.316	1.960	0.05	Ho ₂ not significant.
Female	162	2.96	0.63					

*Significant at 0.05 level; df = 406

Results in table 4 revealed that the mean scores of male and female respondents stood at 2.98 and 2.96 respectively. A closer look at these mean scores showed that they are closely related and did not differ significantly from each other. Furthermore, at 406 degrees of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, the calculated z-score of 0.316 was by far less than the z-table or critical value of ± 1.960 . Hence, the researcher failed to reject the null hypothesis and therefore established that, there was no significant difference between the mean scores of the male and female respondents on the extent agricultural skills are acquired for job creation of university graduating students in Rivers State.

III. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Production skills for job creation of university graduates in Rivers State

Production skills such as the skills for making soap, detergent, perfumes, disinfectants, shoe polish, furniture and shoe making play significant roles in job creation of university graduating students in Rivers State. This skill enables the graduating students to produce some of these items for their domestic or house hold use; thus, saving the money that they would have spent buying these items. This skill will also empower university graduating students to take up the production of some of these items as a business. They can produce soap, detergents, disinfectants and so on in a large scale to earn their living.

Production skills acquired in the university can helped the university graduating students to operate shoe making businesses and wood work/furniture workshops. This business can earn money for them and their families. This finding agrees with Akoloh (2017) who observed that production skills has equipped the recipients with rightful skills to become income independent because production skills such as shoe making, furniture making, food processing and packaging etc, are income generating ventures. This skill plays key role in job creation of many university graduating students by helping them to become self/employed and entrepreneurs. This skill equally plays significant role in the socio-economic stability of the society, it has helped some university graduating students to train other young people on these skills, thus helping them to empower some youths and pull them out of the streets and reducing unemployment, youth restiveness and criminal activities in the society.

Agricultural skills for job creation of university graduates in Rivers State

Agricultural skills for job creation of university graduating students in Rivers State include: preparing the graduating students to start small scale poultry business; helping them to grow vegetables to boost their income; preparing the graduating students production to boost food; to become self/employed and enhancing entrepreneurship management. Agricultural skill is very important in the life of every youth because it enables them to take up agriculture as a

career or a part-time business due to the fact that food is an essential requirement for everyday life. Agricultural skill helps us to achieve food security and also has a wide range of employment opportunities for graduating students. Some graduating students engage in production of food stuffs, livestock, poultry and fishery (aquaculture) and so on. Others engage in packing, marketing and distribution of agricultural products to earn their living.

Some university graduating students in Rivers State engage in small scale poultry farms for the production of eggs and meat to sustain their living. Others grow vegetables, fruits and food stuffs in small scale to complement their income and enhance their economic sustainability. The findings of this study is supported by Okeke (2012) and Asodike (2016) who in their respective studies underscored the prospects of agricultural skills impacted into university graduating students and its potentials in enhancing food security and tackling unemployment of youths. Engagement in agricultural practice is very profitable and capable of sustaining some school leavers and their families economically.

There is a need to encourage university graduating students to practice the agricultural skills they have acquired during their studies because there is high demand for various kinds of agricultural products locally and internationally. Each sector of agriculture that is well practiced has the potentials of sustaining those who engage in it economically. So many university graduating students in Rivers State engage themselves in the cultivation of cocoa, banana, plantain, yam, cassava, oranges and bush mango. They also harvest these crops and sell them to earn money for themselves and their families. Agriculture is the mainstay of the people of Rivers State and agricultural skills acquired in the school can surely helped graduating students in practicing agriculture which plays a key role in their day-to-day living.

IV. CONCLUSION

The following conclusion was made based on the findings of the study:

Results of the study revealed that basic skills play positive role in creating jobs for university graduating students. Basic skills such as production and agricultural skills are very good and they can help university graduating students to get jobs/employment as well as to create jobs too. These skills are trending practical skills that when appropriately acquired and applied, are capable of sustaining graduating students economically. Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the university graduating students acquired sufficient production and agricultural skills to enable them benefit themselves and the society.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. University curriculum should lay more emphasis on the development and teaching of basic skills in the university system.
2. University administrative heads should monitor and supervise adequately the teaching and learning of basic skills in their various institutions.
3. Students on their part should be encouraged to be further rational and prepare themselves for life challenges after graduation by acquiring a skill in their areas of interest.
4. Universities should have a policy making the acquisition of a skill - basic or agriculture a requirement for graduation.
5. Government should enhance the provision of basic social amenities such as electricity, good roads, water, good communication network and so on which have positive influence on investment in business.

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