ASSESSMENT OF THE EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS OF AGRICULTURE GRADUATES IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN OGUN STATE

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Abstract

The study assessed graduates', lecturers' and employers' perception of the importance and competence levels of performing identified transferable skills in the workplace. Survey research approach was adopted. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 300 graduates of Agriculture, 45 lecturers and 27 employers from the institutions offering agricultural courses in the three divisions of Ogun State. The data were analysed using percentages, mean and standard deviation. The demographic characteristics revealed that majority (53%) of the agriculture graduate respondents were male with average age being 28 years and were engaged in Agricultural—related employments or jobs. For Lecturers, Majority (66%) were males with average of 45 years while Employers' average age was 52 years with majority (75%) being males also. The findings revealed that solving problems, 'Creativity, Innovation, and Change' as well as 'Motivation – personal strengths' were perceived by graduates as being most important to their job, while ability to Conceptualize and listening were perceived as least important. In terms of competence, graduates perceived themselves to be most competent at 'Motivation-Personal Strengths', 'Life—long learning and being Creative, Innovative, and initiating Change' but least competent at decision making. It was recommended among others that institutions should revisit academic curricular of their institutions for the purposes of including those skills that could enhance the marketability of agriculture graduates and their career advancement in the workforce.

Keywords: Employability skills, Graduates, Agriculture, Ogun State

Introduction

The changing economic climate and global occurrences plus increasing population and unemployment makes it important for graduates from agricultural institutions to possess transferable skills prior to entering the workplace. The growing unemployment and adoption of privatization which made government to hands-off business and corporation thus, shifting employment opportunities from public to private sector are some of the issues that need to be tackled to make agriculture education more vibrant and attractive. A mismatch or gap between the skills of the unemployed and the skills needed in today's economy could be one of the reasons presumed for the high unemployment rate amongst the agricultural graduates in an ever changing agricultural industry (Alibaygi et al, 2013). It is becoming increasingly important for graduates to apply the knowledge and skills learned in higher education institutions to the workplace.

Pauw, Ooshizen and Westhuizen (2008) discovered in South Africa that many graduates lack soft skills, workplace readiness and experience. Boateng and Ofori-Sarpong (2002) also noted that in Ghana employers of labour referred to recent graduates as those who lack basic skills to complete simple routine assignments and this gave the impression that certification is a mere formality rather than an indication of achievement. The situation is not different in Nigeria as employers of labour believed that

graduates are poorly trained and unproductive on the job. Nigerian graduates have been described variously as half-baked, ill-equipped, ill-trained, of poor quality, of a poor standard and unemployable (Obayan, 2002). However, the current thinking is that tertiary education should develop in the graduates a certain number of generic skills to a level that will ensure continuous creative productivity of the individual. These skills, according to Obayan (2002), include:

1. Analytical power: this comprises an advanced capacity for logical reasoning, employing appropriate verbal, quantitative, graphic, documentary, audio-visual, sensory perceptions and a wide variety of tools.
2. Communication: this includes oral and written as well (as in other possible forms) using the appropriate language and non-verbal form in specific situations to achieve specific objectives.
3. Problem-solving: this is the ability to task one's analytical power to the maximum in developing possible solution paths to the problem in a variety of situations.
4. Team spirit: is the ability to contribute meaningfully to group activities in a wide variety of forms to relate with others to get out of one's shell while remaining oneself.
5. Creativity: refers to the ability to go beyond the well-trodden path in thinking as well as in action.
6. Life-long learning skills; include perseverance, risk taking, a spirit of enquiry, reading as a habit, self-directed learning efforts, the activity to face challenges and so on.

This notion was corroborated by Robinson and Garton (2008) when they listed similar employability skill requirements but added human and technology interaction skill, which means the ability needed to select the proper technology and media for job tasks.

In today's labour market, employers of labour attach much importance to graduate employability which refers to work readiness, that is, possession of the skills, knowledge, attitudes and commercial understanding that will enable new graduates to make productive contributions to organisational objectives soon after commencing work (Mason, 2003). However, research has shown that although these employability skills are transferable, graduates are not prepared in these areas (Candy and Crebert 1991).

The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and the National University Commission (NUC) introduced Entrepreneurial Studies as a compulsory course into Colleges of Educations, Polytechnics and universities curriculum in 2004 to enable graduates to become self-employed. Chiacha and Amaechi (2013) carried out a study on entrepreneurship education and graduate employability in Nigeria. They found out that the entrepreneurial education currently offered in schools did not lead to high employability index of graduates. Also, Pitan and Adedeji (2012) examined the problem of skills mismatch and its prevalence in the Nigeria labour market. The study discovered that graduates of various tertiary institutions were not adequately prepared for work with respect to skills demand of the labour market.

Oyesiku (2010) reported that available statistics show that the nation's job creation capacity is growing at an annual rate of between five percent and seven percent over

the last seven years. Meanwhile, about 213 Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education in the country then produced over 300,000 graduates annually; a number that should ordinarily meet the country's human capital resource needs, but employers willing to pay well to attract skilled workers are increasingly finding it difficult to fill the job vacancies because, employers are often looking for skills that go beyond qualifications and experience. Therefore, the Nigerian society today is facing challenges of getting the education that will deliver to students the right set of skills and knowledge demanded by the labour market. It has been discovered that massive unemployment of Nigerian graduates in the country is traceable to the disequilibrium between labour market requirements and essential employable skills by the graduates. It is against this background that this study seeks to assess the on the employability skills needed by agriculture graduates in tertiary institutions in ogun state.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to bring an insight into the skill requirement of agriculture graduates and how the students, lecturers and employers have perceived or understood capabilities in the various skill requirements of the agriculture industry. Specifically, the study seeks to:

1. Profile the demographic characteristics of respondents
2. Assess graduates 'perceptions of their competence and importance of the employability skills needed in the workplace.
3. examine Lecturers' perception on the importance of the employability skills.
4. Evaluate employers' perception on the importance employability skills

Methodology

The population for this study comprised all agricultural studies graduate (Agricultural science, Economics, education, crop protection, animal science, etc), lecturers in tertiary institutions within Ogun state (Colleges of Education, Polytechnics and Universities) from 2018 to 2019, and employers of agriculture graduates. The research design was survey in nature. Purposive sampling techniques were adopted in selecting 300 graduates due to the dispersed nature of respondents. The 300 agricultural graduates, 45 Agricultural lecturers and 27 agribusiness enterprises were selected from the three major divisions of the state namely, Yewa (Federal Polytechnic Ilaro), Egba (Federal University of Agriculture) and Ijebu (Ogun State University and TASUED). A 67-item questionnaire adapted from Robinson and Garton (2008) with responses ranging from 0 = no importance (or competence) to 3 = major importance (or competence) was administered to students, Lecturers and Agribusiness employers. The 67 items were grouped into 16 skill categories for better understanding. Mean and Standard deviation were used to rank the important skills. The instrument's reliability was Cronbach's alpha of 0.94. Instrument administration was through snowball technique made easy through the guidance and supports of Alumni offices in the selected institutions.

Results

Table 1 reports the summary of the demographic information of respondents.

Table 1: Respondents Demographic information

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Mean
Job Type			
Agricultural Related	165	55	
Non-Agricultural	135	45	
Average Age (Graduates in Yrs)			28
Average Age (Lecturers in Yrs)			45
Average Age (Employers in Yrs)			52
Gender (Graduates)			
Male	159	53	
Female	141	47	
Gender (Lecturers)			
Male	30	66	
Female	15	34	
Gender (Employers)			
Male	20	75	
Female	7	25	

Table 1 revealed that 159 (53%) of the agriculture graduates respondents were male and 141 (47%) were female with average age being 28 years. Majority (55%) were engaged in Agricultural—related employments or jobs. For Lecturers, Majority (66%) were males with average of 45 years. Employers' average age was 52 years and majority (75%) were males.

Graduates' perception on importance and competence of employability skills

Table 2: Students' Perceptions on the Importance & Competence of Employability Skills (n=300)

S/No. Employability Skill	Mean		SD	
	Importance	Competence	Importance	Competence
1. Problem Solving and Analytic	2.58	2.21	0.68	0.86
2. Decision-Making	2.20	2.00	0.82	0.93
3. Organization and Time Management	2.32	2.10	0.78	0.92
4. Risk Taking	2.32	2.13	0.77	1.02
5. Oral Communication	2.25	2.08	0.82	0.91
6. Written Communication	2.31	2.07	0.77	0.87
7. Listening	1.26	2.13	0.69	0.81
8. Interpersonal Relations	2.44	2.31	0.75	0.94
9. Managing Conflict	2.31	2.20	0.81	0.86
10. Leadership and Influence	2.29	2.12	1.0	1.02
11. Coordinating	2.43	2.13	0.74	0.84
12. Creativity, Innovation, and Change	2.46	2.29	0.73	0.96
13. Visioning	2.47	2.12	0.73	0.83
14. Ability to Conceptualize	1.25	2.18	0.78	0.82
15. Lifelong Learning	1.33	2.25	0.72	0.83
16. Motivation-Personal Strengths	2.49	2.32	0.81	0.83

Note. Scale: 0 = No Importance/Competence, 1 = Minor Importance/Competence, 2 = Moderate Importance/Competence, 3 = Major Importance/Competence.

Table 2 shows the summary of graduates' perception on the importance and their competence on the sixteen employability constructs needed in the workplace. The employability skills were ranked in order of importance based on their mean importance (Table2). Graduates ranked "Problem solving and Analytic" skill as the first and foremost important skill needed in the workplace followed by 'Creativity, Innovation, and Change' and the third important skill needed was Motivation – personal strengths. Whereas, 'Decision making' was ranked as the last skill needed by them. Ability to Conceptualize, Lifelong learning and listening were ranked below 2.0 point, meaning they may not be important or of minor importance. Table 2 further shows means and standard deviations of self-perceived level of competence of graduates at performing the employability skill constructs. Accordingly, Motivation-Personal Strengths, Life—long learning and Creativity, Innovation, and Change skills were ranked highest as areas the graduates perceived that they were competent. They perceived that they were least competent in Written Communication, Oral Communication, Decision making, organization and time management.

Table 3: Lecturers' Perception of the Importance of Employability Skills (n=45)

S/No. Employability Skill	Mean	SD
1. Problem Solving and Analytic	2.48	0.81
2. Decision-Making	2.09	0.83
3. Organization and Time Management	2.19	0.82
4. Risk Taking	2.06	0.85
5. Oral Communication	2.31	0.85
6. Written Communication	2.22	0.83
7. Listening	2.12	0.84
8. Interpersonal Relations	2.4	0.83
9. Managing Conflict	2.25	0.78
10. Leadership and Influence	2.2	0.89
11. Coordinating	2.37	0.80
12. Creativity, Innovation and Change	2.47	0.86
13. Visioning	2.45	0.81
14. Ability to Conceptualize	2.32	0.82
15. Lifelong Learning	2.44	0.75
16. Motivation-Personal Strengths	2.44	0.78

Table 3 summarizes lecturers' perception on the importance of employability Skills. The perception on importance of employability skills was studied by a purposive sample of 45 agricultural lecturers from Department/faculty of agriculture of selected tertiary institutions in Ogun State. The employability skills were ranked in order of importance based on their mean importance (Table 3). Lecturers ranked Creativity, Innovation and Change as the first and foremost important skill needed in the workplace followed by Visioning and the third important skill needed as Motivation – personal strengths and Lifelong learning. Whereas, Risk taking was ranked as the last

skilled needed by them. The current economic environment requires employees to add value by Creativity, Innovation and enacting Changes to existing practice. The academia earns credits when in the industry their products (Graduates) excel in deployment of innovative and creativity skills. This possibly account for priority given to Creativity, Innovation and Change. Another aspect which favours employers is self- driving forces to achieve targets. However, the risks involved are bore by the organisations which supports her employees in the process of target achievement.

Table 4: Employers' Perception of the Importance of Employability Skills (n=27)

S/No. Employability Skill	Mean	SD
1. Problem Solving and Analytic skillssss	2.49	0.48
2. Decision-Making	2.39	0.77
3. Organization and Time Management	2.38	0.72
4. Risk Taking	2.38	0.61
5. Oral Communication	2.38	0.73
6. Written Communication	2.38	0.79
7. Listening	2.38	0.75
8. Interpersonal Relations	2.38	0.59
9. Managing Conflict	2.38	0.72
10. Leadership and Influence	2.38	0.80
11. Coordinating	2.38	0.65
12. Creativity, Innovation, and Change	2.40	0.62
13. Visioning	2.41	0.59
14. Ability to Conceptualize	2.40	0.71
15. Lifelong Learning	2.40	0.59
16. Motivation-Personal Strengths	2.40	0.64

Table 4 describes Employers' Perception of the Importance of Employability Skills. The employability skills were ranked in order of importance based on their mean importance (Table
4). From the Table, Problem solving and analytic skill was ranked as the first and foremost important skill needed in the workplace followed by visioning and the third important skill needed is creativity, innovation and change. Whereas the least important skill needed ranges from organization and time management, risk taking, oral communication, written communication, listening, interpersonal relations, managing conflict, leadership influence and coordination. The perception of alumni and employers on risk taking ability is the same and the employers feel that in the middle level and lower level management the staff needs to just carry out routine sales promotion jobs in private organisations.

Discussion of Findings

Graduates perceived that all sixteen employability skills were moderately important to entry-level positions in the workplace as shown by their mean values. However, Problem solving and Analytic", 'Creativity and Innovation and 'Motivation skills respectively were the most important

skills as they were ranked first, second and third most important employability skills by agricultural graduates. Similarly, Motivation, Life—long learning and 'Creative Innovation were the self-perceived competence of agriculture graduates in the study area. The implication is that graduates believed that it is important to be able to solve problems, work independently, deal with stress and stay positive. This finding is consistent with previous research by Billing (2003) and Schmidt (1999), who found solving problems, communicating effectively, working on a team, thinking critically, and possessing interpersonal skills to be the most important employability skills desired by employers. In contrast, graduates rated ability to conceptualized and life-long learning near the bottom of the list of important employability skills. A possible reason this skill was of little importance to graduates could be due to the fact that most first holders are usually very weak in research thus would detest any concept that could remind them of their experiences during their final year project research of which 'conceptualizing' is a significant term. Again, the believe that on-the-job experience is a means of life—long learning could have informed the reason it was rated low. They perceived that they were least competent in Written Communication, Oral Communication, Decision making as well as organization and time management. These findings are in tandem with that of Alibaygi et al. (2013) and Sebastian (2020).

When comparing importance and competence, graduates ranked Problem Solving and Analytic skill as the most important skill needed in the workplace, it was rated fourth on the competence scale. It could be implied that graduates need more experience at solving problems. Graduates rated Creativity, Innovation, and Change 2nd on importance and 3rd on competence may indicate that the curriculum is adequately addressing graduates' needs in this area. The ranking of Motivation-Personal Strengths second on importance and first on competence by graduates may indicate resilience and adequacy of curriculum in meeting the needs of agriculture graduates in the area. Graduates rated 7 of the 16 employability skills higher in importance scale than competence. This finding is consistent with Radhakrishna and Bruening (1994) in addition to Robinson and Garton (2008) when they found that entry-level employees perceived employability skills to be more important than their ability to perform those skills.

Lecturers and employers placed a high amount of importance on Problem Solving and Analytic, Lifelong Learning, Motivation-Personal Strengths and Creativity, Innovation, and Change employability skills. For an employee to deliver on given assignment and add value to the workplace, S/he must possess transferable skills and foster attributes that will enable him work, facilitate the success of the organisations and contribute to society and the economy. The findings agree with the opinion of Kelvin, Stuart, Dely and Jon (2011) who stated that employers expect graduates to have technical and discipline competences from their degrees but require graduates also to demonstrate a range of broader skills and attributes that include team-working, communication, leadership, critical thinking, problem solving and managerial abilities. Therefore, Departments /schools/ faculty of agriculture who wish to enhance their curriculum should start by enhancing their current curriculum to mirror these skills.

Recommendations

The outcome of this study has revealed the perceived importance of certain employability skills and perceived competence level by agriculture graduates, lecturers and employers. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are put forward: One, agricultural institutions should continue to provide learning experiences that support the acquisition of the highly rated skills such as Problem solving and Analytic skill, Creativity and Innovation skill and Motivation skill because they are perceived as being important to agriculture graduates. Two, agriculture Departments/schools/faculty should offer workshops/trainings to their faculty members in order to provide direction for curriculum enhancement; revisit academic curricular of their institutions for the purposes of including those skills that could possibly enhance the marketability of agriculture graduates and their career advancement in the workforce.

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