



Transiting From School to Work: A Tracer Survey of Graduates of Agricultural Economics Department, University of Nigeria Nsukka

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ABSTRACT

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One key way higher education institutions can fully understand the workplace needs of their graduates so as to replan their curriculum is through tracer studies of their previous graduates. Yet in Nigeria, few studies of this nature have been conducted although evidence suggest that such surveys have positively influenced educational policy and curriculum where they have been conducted worldwide. This paper is from a survey of graduates of Agricultural Economics in a Nigerian University. It examined the relevance and application of some agricultural economics programme to the market place needs of the graduates. The graduates of the department from 1990 in both B.Sc. and M. Sc. formed the sample frame. Data was collected through face to face interviews, and emails. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage and mean. The respondent's perception of the technical skills acquired showed that for analytical skills, the mean score was 2.50 in a 4 point rating scale, while budgeting, planning and organizing were rated 2.34; 2.41 and 2.31 respectively. Leadership skills like team building, communication, leadership and networking had mean scores of 2.24; 2.45; 2.07 and 2.15 respectively. It is recommended that such a study should be conducted in a larger scale in the faculty of Agriculture and that there is need for a review of curriculum.

1.0 Introduction

Agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa is a strategic sector for addressing the many constraints that keep the region from achieving broad based economic growth, increasing household incomes and employment and reducing poverty and food insecurity (FAO 2018; Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (FMARD), 2022; New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD), 2013; Nigerian Agricultural Stakeholder Forum, 2009; Nwafor et al, 2025; Orji et. al. 2021). The Nigerian Agricultural Stakeholder Forum (2009) recognized that since labour constitutes a larger percentage of production costs (75%) especially in small holder agriculture, competitiveness can be improved by labour saving technologies. Also it recognized that productivity and incomes can be enhanced by improving farm management practices. NEPAD (2002) observed that production is mainly by producers majority of whom are unskilled and therefore unable to adopt new technologies, thus anything that can be done to improve labour efficiency will improve livelihoods and any reduction in drudgery will facilitate human and

social capital acquisition. This will require development of appropriate training materials and aids.

It is widely recognized that the most efficient, highly productive agriculture in the world has been fueled by technology and innovation (Addison et al., 2023, Mayer, 1980, Wambua et al, 2021). Such a sophisticated agriculture requires capable manpower for its development. The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM, 2013) stated that strengthening capacities of people, institutions, processes and the necessary infrastructure is critical if Africa's Agriculture is to be transformed. The West and Central African Council for Agricultural Research and Development (WECARD, 2010) had noted that knowledge creation, use and dissemination is the most important development challenge for developing countries. The higher education sub sector is crucial for economic growth of any country as it can provide highly skilled workers to drive technological innovations.



Education is a key tool for empowerment of people for all round growth (Dzomeku et al., 2024; Giotis et al., 2025; Kioupi & Voulvoulis, 2019; World Bank, 2007). Dabalén, et al., (2000) identified two ways in which higher education is crucial for economic growth: first they observed that highly skilled workers promote innovation stemming from research which results to higher social productivity; secondly, even without research, a country with skilled labour force has a greater tendency to grow than one with lesser skilled labour force. Suh and Nyiauwung (2023) observed that developing appropriate skills and knowledge is key to maximizing people's potential in everyday livelihood activities. Education is a key tool for building knowledge and skills in individuals, promoting competencies that enhance both employability and productivity (Giotis et al., 2025).

As developing countries move towards knowledge-based economies, there is need to orient graduates from higher education systems in the countries to this new trend. The Education sub-sector - in particular the Higher Education sector- produces the majority of the skilled human resources that supply the labour market. Higher education subsector is therefore key to production of the human resources desired by the country to meet its development needs (Abanyam & Agbo 2019; Adeyemo et al, 2010; Dabalén et al., 2000; De O'Campo et al., 2012; Kolawale & Arikpo, 2008; Kwarteng, 2021; National Council for Higher Education (NCHE), 2006). Albina and Sumagaysay (2020) stressed that the educational process must go beyond knowledge impartation and skill development to ensure that employable graduates are employed.

According to Komives et al., (2019), agricultural colleges and universities with agricultural faculties have a very important role in developing specialists for the agricultural sector. As noted by Dzomeku et al., 2024, a nation's economy runs on the knowledge and skills of its people. It has been established that education wields a positive impact on agricultural output (Maini et al., 2021; Ninh, 2021; Reimers and Klasen, 2013). World Bank, (2007), observed that the promotion of human capital and the production of knowledge are perhaps the most crucial factors in agricultural development strategies.

The Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (RUFORUM) (2013) observed that the report from the Expert Panel on a Science Agenda for Agriculture in Africa showed that a productive, competitive and efficient food and agricultural sector in Africa remains essential for sustainable development as well as for economic and political stability. The effective engagement of Africa's tertiary agricultural educational institutions in the national agricultural research systems and agricultural development frameworks such as CAADPs is of fundamental importance as economic and social developments are increasingly driven by the advancement and application of knowledge.

Across Africa, the Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa (FARA) (2006), observed that the quality of tertiary agricultural education is important because it is a key determinant of the competencies and expertise of professionals, civil servants, specialists, teachers, technicians, business leaders and all other actors in all aspects of the agricultural sector. Investment in agricultural education and training is required to propel increase in agricultural output in Africa (World Bank, 2007). Several Africa wide initiatives recognize the importance of agricultural education and training (NEPAD, 2007).

In Nigeria, the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) is a leading University of choice for higher Education. The 2012 Annual Report of the University stated that University of Nigeria has a mission to stay at the fore front of teaching and learning, research and development, innovation, knowledge creation and knowledge dissemination, human capital resource development and community service (UNN Annual Report, 2012). Established in 1955, the University currently has eighteen Faculties/Colleges including the Faculty of Agriculture. The faculty of Agriculture, UNN is one of the foremost faculties in the University as the University is a land grant University. The Faculty has over the years produced graduates in various fields of Agriculture including Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Extension, Animal Science, Crop Science, Food Science and Technology, Home science and Nutrition and Soil Science.

According to De O'campo, et al. (2012), the image of a tertiary institution is most likely tied to



its reputation of producing excellent graduates who easily land a job after graduation. Educational institutions should not only contribute knowledge but also equip graduates to land a good job and become successful and socially recognized (Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC), 2013; Menez, 2014 and Cuandra et al., 2019). Dzomeku et al (2024) argued that educational institutions should document their graduates' employability profile in addition to showcasing the impact these institutions have in the graduate personal and career development. Employability can be best tracked through a program's alumni (Dzomeku et al, 2024). Graduate tracer surveys are common research methods for these educational institutions to check on the employability of their graduates (Cuadra et al., 2019; World Bank, 2019). Tracer surveys are alumni studies designed to track activities of graduates of an educational institution (Senekal and Munro, 2019; Mubuuke et al, 2014). It is one of the tools educational institutions can use to assess the relevance and applicability of the courses offered to the workplace needs of their graduates (Noko and Ngulube, 2013). Tracer studies are important as they provide valuable feedback for a higher education institution on the status of their alumni, their perceptions of the value of courses offered and essential skills and knowledge required in the workplace (World bank, 2019; Noko and Ngulube, 2013). Other stakeholders can benefit from information arising from tracer surveys. For instance students and parents can use information from tracer surveys to guide decisions on career trajectories to pursue (World Bank, 2019).

In Nigeria, few studies on the relationship between education and employment have been conducted. These studies focused on factors determining employability of Nigerian graduates (Adeyemo et al., 2010), predictors of self-employment among unemployed Nigeria graduates (Kolawole and Arikpo, 2008), and labour markets prospects of university graduates in Nigeria (Dabalen, et al., 2000). Apart from Adeyemo, et al. (2010) study, which related graduate employment outcomes to curricula, the others employed typical labour market measures such as economic sector, income, gender role stereotype, graduate employment rates by field of study, unemployment rate by level of education. Schomburg (2010) however stated that graduate surveys should not only focus on the above economic indicators but also inquire about the

kind of work tasks, the relationships between study and work and professional value and job satisfaction. Schomburg (2010) further noted that labour market indicators provide a narrow and conservative view about the possible impact of higher education on employment and work. A more holistic view into the character of the occupation and the kind of work tasks are a richer source for curricular innovation than mere labour market data. A tracer survey is more apt in eliciting such kind of information. Such a study might stimulate thoughts about the strengths and weaknesses of the training of specific skills, emphasize on broad knowledge, socialization and personality development. A few tracer surveys have been conducted in Nigeria. For instance, Odede et al. (2021) conducted a tracer survey on technical education graduates of Osun State College of education. The study assessed the employment status and nature of employment as well as the relevance of knowledge acquired to employment and graduate satisfaction with the job. However, core technical skills of a graduate in the field as well as soft and interpersonal skills were not examined in the studies assessed. Studies have shown that soft skills are increasingly important in an individual's employability (Balcar, 2014).

Such concerns underpin this paper which is based on a tracer study of Agricultural Economics graduates in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. No such study had been previously conducted for the field in Nigeria. It is important to assess the relevance and application of agricultural economics program to the marketplace needs of the graduates. The objectives of this study were to identify socioeconomic characteristics of Agricultural Economics graduates; identify the types of institutions the respondents are working in, ascertain the relevance and application of some Agricultural Economics Programme to the market place needs of our graduates and recommend adjustments in the program where necessary.

2.0 Methodology

This study was conducted in Nigeria. The focus was on graduates from the University of Nigeria Nsukka who studied agricultural economics. University of Nigeria is in Enugu State, South-east Nigeria, but the graduates are dispersed all over Nigeria and abroad. Although a law to establish the University was passed in 1955, it was in 1960 that the University was formally opened. The university currently has eighteen faculties including the faculty of agriculture.



Graduates of Agricultural Economics Department UNN who have either completed a B.Sc. or an M.Sc. formed the sample frame, particularly graduates from 2005 to 2012. From a directory of the various graduating class members compiled in the various editions of the student's magazine - APMA Magazine, their phone numbers were extracted. Additional contacts of those who graduated earlier were obtained from staff members. Bulk sms was sent to them requesting their email addresses so that questionnaire could be sent to them. In addition, field visits were made to some of the catchment States of the University namely Anambra and Enugu to administer questionnaire. Responses from 30 graduates to the questionnaire was obtained. Data collected were on socio-economic characteristics like gender, age, household size and years of education; ICT, technical, and soft skills acquired during the program. The relevance and application of some Agricultural Economics programme to the market place needs of our graduates, was ascertained using a four point Likert type scale questions of very relevant, relevant, of little relevance and not relevant with the option of 3, 2, 1, and 0. Respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement to these variables. A mean cut off of 1.5 was obtained. Any variable of equal to or greater than 1.5 was considered relevant, while a mean score of less than 1.5 was not regarded as relevant. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage and mean statistic.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Socio-Economic Background

The socio-economic background of the respondents is presented in Table 1. In terms of socio-economic background, table 1 indicates that the majority of the respondents (60%) were male, while the remaining 40% were female. This is an improvement over a WECARD (2010) survey in West and Central Africa which found that female Agricultural graduates represented only between 4% and 10% of the sample. The study showed that majority of the respondents were aged between 41 and 50. A good percentage (73.3%) of the respondents were married, while more than half graduated before year 2000. More than 95% of those who responded are currently working. Of those who worked, 48.3% had worked for 5 years or below. Those who had more than fifteen years of experience were 24.14% of the respondents.

Table1: Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	18	60
Female	12	40
Age		
30yrs and below	6	20
31-40	6	20
41-50	13	43.33
51-60	5	16.67
61 and above	0	0
Marital Status		
Single	5	16.7
Married	22	73.3
Widowed	3	10.0
Year of Graduation		
Below 1989	4	13.3
Between 1990-2000	8	26.7
Between 2001-2010	16	53.3
2011 to date	2	6.7
Degree obtained		
B.Agric. only	11	36.7
M.Sc. Only	8	26.7
Both	11	36.7
Employment Status		
Employed	29	96.7
Unemployed	1	3.3
Years of work Experience		
5years and below	14	48.3
6-10years	5	17.24
11-15years	3	10.34
16-20yrs	4	13.80
Above 20years	3	10.34

3.2 Type of Institution and Nature of Work

The type of institution the respondents worked in is presented in table 2. The table shows that majority (37.9%) work as public servants in the Ministry of Agriculture and the Agricultural Development Programme (ADP), while 34.5% of the respondents work in the University. The few graduates who worked in the private sector were mostly self-employed, and only three of them worked in agriculture related enterprises

Table 2: Type of Institution Respondents work With

Characteristics	Freq	%
Type of Institution		
Private sector	5	17.2
Government	11	37.9
University	10	34.5
National Research Institute	2	6.9
International Research Institute	1	3.4
Type of private sector Institution		
Distribution (like transportation, buying & selling, Communication etc.)	1	33.3
Service sector	1	33.3
Banking Services	1	33.3

This finding is consistent with that of the WECARD (2010) where it was observed that the private sector employed only a very small percentage of Agricultural graduates, while the public sector employed majority of the graduates.

3.3 Nature of work

The nature of work done by the respondents was examined. The result is presented in table 3. The table shows the diversity of the work type by respondents. It showed that majority (34.4%) of the respondents worked as university lecturers and researchers while 10.3% work as secondary school teachers and administrators/managers respectively

Table 3: Nature of work done by respondents

Category	Freq	%
Management & Administration	3	10.34
Auditing	1	3.45
Planning & Budgeting	2	6.89
Program development & Implementation	2	6.89
Business development & Human Resource	2	6.89
Extension Services	2	6.89
Teaching in secondary school	3	10.34
Lecturing & Research	10	34.47
Researcher in Research institutes	2	6.89
Supervisor	2	6.89

3.4 Relevance of Programme and Training to Workplace Needs

In terms of relevance, all the respondents stated that the program offered in the department were relevant to their workplace needs. They identified technical skills such as budgeting; planning; organizing; coordinating; and controlling as relevant to their work.

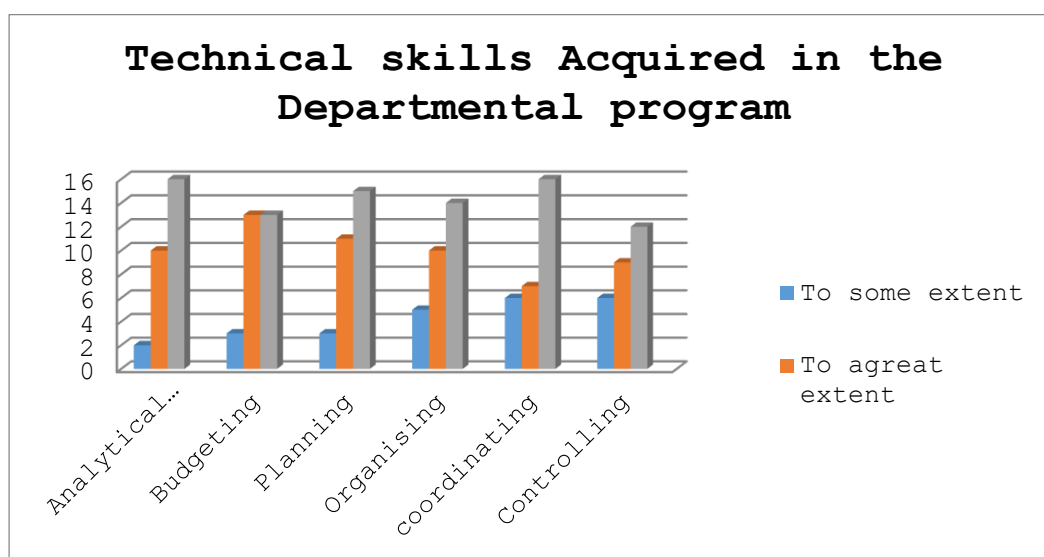


Fig 1: Technical skills acquired through the program

3.5 The interpersonal skills acquired during the program

Interpersonal skills like communication, leadership, networking, and problem-solving

ability although not out rightly taught in any University, are skills that usually are acquired in the course of undertaking an undergraduate program for a well-rounded student. These skills are increasingly required in the workplace.

The interpersonal skills acquired during the program was ascertained among the respondents. Majority stated that during the course of the

program; their interpersonal skills like team building skills; leadership skills, and communication skills were enhanced.

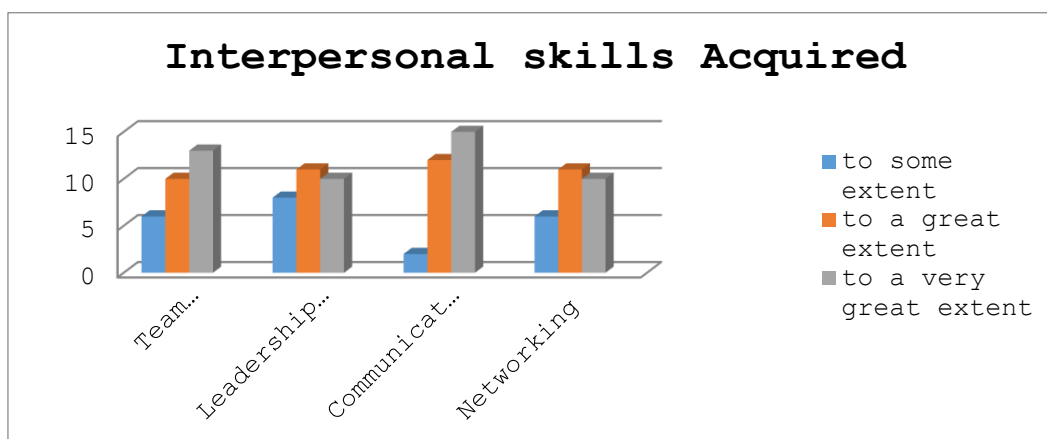


Fig 2: Interpersonal Skills Respondents Acquired in The Program

The bar chart shows that many of the respondents stated that team building and communication skills were acquired mainly during the program, while not many acquired leadership and networking skills.

3.6 ICT Skills Acquired in the Programme

Amongst the respondents, some stated that the program made them seek proficiency in ICT skills. Some of the respondents stated that the program made them acquire some level of proficiency in MS word. This could be because they were required in the course of the programme

to submit typed term papers and assignment and finally a research project report. Some of them may have taken pains to acquire the skill so as to do it themselves. For excel, about three (10%) of the respondents stated that they did not acquire the skill in the training in the department. Most others stated that the program enabled them to acquire the skill. In terms of presentation with Power-point, three (that is 10%) also stated that they did not acquire the skill in the course of training, while majority did. For e-mailing and Internet search majority indicated that they acquired the skills during the course of their training.

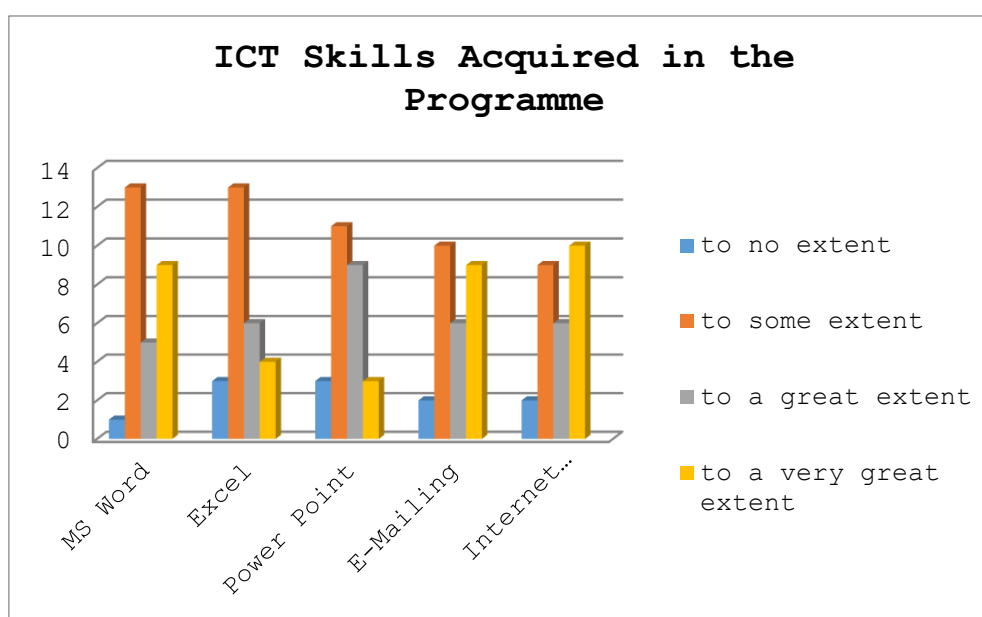


Figure 3: ICT Skills Acquired in the Programme

The bar chart shows that Internet searching, e-mailing and MS word were ICT skills that the

respondents acquired mainly during the course of their training.



3.7 Respondents' perception of Helpfulness of Program to work place needs

The respondents' perception of the relevance of the technical, ICT and leadership development aspects of the program was identified using likert scale. The responses from the graduates interviewed showed that the program generally delivered relevant skills to them which they use in their workplace. The mean score for analytical skills acquired was 2.50 on a four point scale. Budgeting, planning and organizing were rated 2.34; 2.41 and 2.31 respectively. The mean score for the other technical skills of coordinating and controlling were 2.34 and 2.22 respectively. These skill areas are important in work delivery. As Goleman (1998) noted, IQ and technical skills are important for grooming leaders.

The relevance of the program to the leadership skills of the respondents were also examined. Skills like Team Building, leadership, communication and networking had mean scores of 2.24; 2.07; 2.45 and 2.15 respectively.

Table 3: Respondents perception of Helpfulness of Program to work place needs

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Analytical skill	2.50	.638
Budgeting	2.34	.670
Planning	2.41	.682
Organizing	2.31	.761
Coordinating	2.34	.814
Controlling	2.22	.801
Team building skills	2.24	.786
Leadership skills	2.07	.799
Communication skills	2.45	.632
Networking	2.15	.770
Ms word	1.79	.957
Excel	1.42	.902
PowerPoint	1.46	.859
e-mailing	1.81	1.001
Internet searching	1.89	1.013

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations:

University academic program should be designed to transfer employable knowledge and skills to

students to ensure productivity of graduates. Studies to guide higher education institutions to re-align their program to meet employment needs of their graduates are limited particularly in sub-Saharan Africa. This survey elicited alumni socio-economic characteristics, workplace needs and relevance of the program to their career needs. This survey showed that graduates of the department of Agricultural economics found the program relevant and helpful to their workplace needs. However some of the courses may need to be reviewed to bring in more practical aspects and relate them to workplace situations. The ICT and interpersonal skills aspects should be strengthened. The department/ faculty is advised to incorporate the results of this survey in the design of a more relevant agribusiness program.

Most of the respondents who proffered suggestions stated that the program should be more practical oriented with exposure to real workplace scenario in the area of farm management and accounting. They also stated that the mathematical and statistical courses should be strengthened. There is need to improve strategy for acquiring ICT skills among students to increase their proficiency in it. It is recommended that the program be reviewed in line with these suggestions, and that opportunities for students to develop soft skills should be created.

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