

Original Research Article

Working Skills Possessed by Agricultural Education University Students and Career Advancement in Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

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The study was conducted to assess the working skills possessed by agricultural education university students for career advancement in Rivers State, Nigeria. The study which adopted descriptive survey design has a population of 86 final year students of vocational agricultural education from Rivers State University, Port Harcourt. There was no sampling since the population was small and of manageable size. Three research questions guided the study. The instrument for data collection was the researcher's self-constructed 30-item questionnaire. The findings of the study revealed among others that relevant vocational skills obtainable through vocational agricultural education form part of the working skills needed by university students to achieve career advancement in any agribusinesses of choice. Again, the findings revealed that university students need adequate entrepreneurship skills to advance in agricultural careers of their choice. Consequently, it was recommended among others that governments should provide adequate funds for vocational programmes for it to realize its objectives and secondly, university authorities should encourage students to enroll in agricultural education programmes to increase their career choices since it has a multifaceted nature.

Keywords: Career advancement, University students, Vocational agricultural education, Working skills

INTRODUCTION

Career can be defined as the sequence of occupational jobs and positions held by an individual throughout his work life. This implies that, the totality of different job roles performed by an individual in his lifetime is known as his career. One can advance his career through many vocations. Vocation therefore can be described as any skill-based job or occupation carried out by an individual in order to earn a living (Ekezie and Owo, 2019). Vocation could also be seen as one's primary work role at any given time whether in paid or self-employment. Thus, Agricultural education graduates could start and advance their careers in paid or self-employment (Ogen, 2007). However, for one to be proficient in a chosen

vocation, grow or succeed in such careers, acquisition of relevant skills is indispensable.

Skills are special attributes possessed by an individual in a given vocation gained through effective training and practice (Samuel, 2017). Skill is any current, visible competence displayed by someone to accomplish a scholarly psychomotor action (Harlin et al., 2007). Skillful action requires quality application of already acquired knowledge and competence to achieve positive results as well as the acquisition of new knowledge. Lindner and Dooley (2002) describe skill as capacity to apply present competence to perform an observable performance or a behavior that results in observable outcomes. Similarly,

Ogbuanya and Bakari (2014) opine that skill is an individual's capability to control component of behavior, thinking and feeling within specified frameworks and a particular task domain. In the same vein, Okorie (2000) describes skill as the expertness, practical ability, dexterity and tact which an individual possessed to his advantage in the field of work. Furthermore, Osinem (2008) opines that skill is an individual's capacity to control elements of behaviour, thinking and feeling within specified contexts and within particular task domains to achieve meaningful results at work. In the same vein, Ekezie and Owo (2019) posit that skills comprise special abilities gained through committed learning and practice which enables an individual to be proficient in his work role in a chosen vocation. A skilled worker is a valuable asset to his organization, employer and other employees as he works meticulously towards the realization of the organizational objectives. Skill therefore distinguishes workers in the work environment because it easily showcases which worker is competent and which is not. These skills which enable an individual to perform excellently and advance in any chosen career are called working skills.

Working skills are major outcome of education and high quality training. These are special skills which enable one to be productive in the world of work (Ademu et al., 2018). Work skills encompass any skill, knowledge and competencies that enhance the capacity of prospective employee to secure and retain as well as progress at work and cope with any emerging challenges (Ochi, 2004). According to Yusuf and Soyemi (2012), vocational skills acquisition is key to the economic, social and entrepreneurial transformation in any nation. Vocational skills are very essential in advancing agricultural entrepreneurship aimed at improving the quality of life among the rural populace in Nigeria through self-employment and massive job creation as well as career advancement in Agricultural education. Entrepreneurship skills are part of the skills developed in agricultural education. Innovativeness, leadership, resourcefulness, management, among others constitute some of the entrepreneurship skills that can lead to career advancement (Okwelle and Owo, 2018). These skill sets enhance one's proficiency in agribusiness of choice, thereby enabling him to effectively manage his business in order to create more jobs for others. In addition, students of agricultural education also acquire teaching skills from the training received in the university since agricultural education is multifaceted. According to Adiele, Leigh and Abraham (2010), some teaching skills needed for effective service delivery include empathy, classroom management, motivation, discipline, numeracy, sound professional knowledge, effective communication, information and communication technology, creativity, among others. These teaching skills assist in creating educational, entrepreneurial and career awareness in students as well as relevant

agricultural career mindsets. Similarly, vocational skills that can be developed in agricultural education according to Ekezie (2019) include skills in snail farming, hatchability, feed production, among others. Thus, work skills generally assist people to achieve overall success in their job roles. All these skills are obtainable through agricultural education programme of universities.

Agricultural education encompasses a gradual integration of various agricultural skills in the learner for increased productivity. According to Osinem (2007), Agricultural education is a process of imparting agricultural knowledge, skills and attitudes in the learners at any level through practical and theoretical experience and guidance so as to prepare them for rewarding careers in the field of agriculture after their graduation. Agricultural education is thus, a course of study which incorporates knowledge and skills in farm programmes and activities aimed at exposing students to various occupations and vocational opportunities in agriculture (Ademu, et al., 2018). Agricultural education encourages the development of job skills needed by an individual in order to be established and become successful in any agricultural exercises. In related studies, it was discovered that the educational levels of workers to some extent determine their performances at work and this is also applicable in all areas including agricultural careers (Akinlua, 2011; Boukary, 2014). According to Ademu, et al. (2018), greater productivity is realizable via improved skills or knowledge which could be achieved through proper educational training and development which agricultural education offers. Thus, it implies that the more skillful a learner is, the better his performance at work. To this end, recent agricultural education curricular stressed on the acquisition of productive work skills for paid and self-employment through prescribed activities and projects which are integral aspects of agriculture. Thus, the significance of agricultural education programme depends on the suitability of the impacts that its graduates create in agreement with the requirements of the world of work and socio-economic developmental needs of the nation. This agricultural education involves teaching and learning in organizational management skills and leadership required for the smooth operation of personal enterprise, teaching skills, entrepreneurship skills as well as core vocational agricultural skills in the areas of farming, fishing, poultry, soil science, food production, among others. Agricultural education programme enhances improvement of traditional agriculture and concentrates on the training in essential skills applicable in crop farming, snail rearing, poultry farming, farm management techniques, goat farming among others which are very crucial for a successful career in agriculture (Cajethan and Benardine, 2015). The primary purpose of agricultural education at all levels of education therefore is to prepare students /learners for innovative careers in agriculture and to prepare them for advance education in agriculture

through quality research. Therefore, the teaching of agriculture at all levels of education is meant to prepare learners in vocational agriculture for proficiency in farming for increased food supply. According to the Federal Republic of Nigeria's National Policy on Education (NPE) (2013), the objectives of vocational agricultural education include the following:

- To develop skills and have scientific knowledge and competencies required in agricultural education.
- To develop an understanding and appreciation of career opportunities in agricultural occupation and the preparation required to progress in production agriculture, agricultural business and other careers in agriculture.
- To develop the ability to secure satisfaction in the placement and advancement in agricultural occupation through programmes on continuing education.
- To develop leadership qualities, attitudes, thrifts scholarship co-operations, citizenship and patriotism by participating in experiences and activities of agricultural programmes.
- To develop competencies required by individuals engaged in agriculture.
- To develop practical skills and competences in agricultural research.

Similarly, Ogen (2007) posit that the aim of agricultural education is to support people to develop skills, capabilities, potentials and other forms of behavior of positive value to the society for socio-economic transformation. Thus, agriculture in Nigeria should be seen as an economic activity that does not only require technology, good climate, markets but also in dire need of skilled manpower. The work skills available in agricultural education programmes do not only prepare the people for meaningful participation in agriculture, but also offer them a good platform to contribute to the economic development of the country (Ademu et al., 2018). Quality agricultural education is key to developing relevant work skills for both paid and self-employment and as such championing effective agricultural career development in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, many graduates including those who studied agricultural education find it uneasy to secure paid employment or create jobs for themselves. Some of these graduates would have become experts in their chosen careers assuming they possess requisite skills in agricultural education. Poor acquisition of life skills by Nigerian graduates makes it difficult for them to pursue rewarding agricultural careers for economic development. According to Amadi and Nnodim (2018), most graduates are unable to cope with the job demands in their vocational areas due to poor acquisition of working skills. Similarly, Nwankwo (2000) reveals that Agricultural education students in Nigerian universities show poor career interests in vocational agricultural education due to poor skills development. This development necessitates the present study entitled "Working Skills

Possessed by Agricultural Education University Students and Career Advancement in Rivers State, Nigeria".

The main purpose of this study therefore was to assess the working skills possessed by Agricultural Education University students for career advancement in Rivers State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to determine:

1. The vocational skills possessed by Agricultural education university students for career advancement in Rivers State, Nigeria.
2. The entrepreneurship skills possessed by Agricultural education university students for career advancement in Rivers State, Nigeria.
3. The teaching skills possessed by Agricultural education university students for career advancement in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Based on these specific objectives, the following three questions were posed to guide the study:

1. What are the vocational skills possessed by Agricultural education university students for career advancement in Rivers State, Nigeria?
2. What are the entrepreneurship skills possessed by Agricultural education university students for career advancement in Rivers State, Nigeria?
3. What are the teaching skills possessed by Agricultural education university students for career advancement in Rivers State, Nigeria?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted descriptive survey design. A descriptive survey according to Nwankwo (2016) reports the situation as it appears without influencing the independent variables of the study. A population of 86 final year Bachelor's degree students of vocational agricultural education from Rivers State University, Port Harcourt was used for the study. There was no sampling since the population was small and manageable. Thus, the study population also serves as sample. The instrument for data collection was the researcher's self-constructed 30-item questionnaire titled "Work Skills Possessed by Agricultural Education Students Questionnaire (WSPAESQ)". WSPAESQ was constructed on a 5-point Likert Scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Undecided (U), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) corresponding to numerical values of 5,4,3,2 and 1 respectively. The instrument was face-validated by three experts in vocational agricultural education from Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt. In determining the reliability of the instrument, 18 final year students of Agricultural education from the University of Uyo, who were not part of the study were randomly selected and used for three pilot testing and an average reliability coefficient of 0.76 was obtained confirming the internal consistency of the items via Cronbach's Alpha method. Out of the 86 questionnaires

Table 1. Vocational Skills Possessed by Agricultural Education University Students for Career Advancement in Rivers State, Nigeria

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Agricultural education students developed skills in snail rearing.	3.88	1.03	Agree
2	Agricultural education students developed skills in fish farming.	3.24	0.89	Agree
3	Agricultural education students developed skills in goat rearing.	4.16	1.21	Agree
4	Agricultural education students developed skills in poultry.	3.82	0.62	Agree
5	Agricultural education students developed skills in soil science and crop cultivation.	4.08	1.09	Agree
6	Agricultural education students developed skills in horticulture.	2.88	1.02	Disagree
7	Agricultural education students developed skills in farm mechanization.	2.91	1.16	Disagree
8	Agricultural education students developed skills in pig rearing.	4.22	0.78	Agree

Source: *Researcher's Field Survey; 2020.*

Table 2. Entrepreneurship Skills Possessed by Agricultural Education University Students for Career Advancement in Rivers State, Nigeria

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Agricultural education students developed skills in business management.	3.21	1.07	Agree
2	Agricultural education students developed skills in financial accounting.	2.78	0.96	Disagree
3	Agricultural education students developed skills in leadership.	3.96	0.88	Agree
4	Agricultural education students developed decision-making skills.	4.22	0.65	Agree
5	Agricultural education students developed marketing skills.	3.08	1.11	Agree
6	Agricultural education students developed skills in strategic planning.	3.18	1.04	Agree
7	Agricultural education students developed skills in problem-solving.	3.69	0.81	Agree
8	Agricultural education students developed skills in data analysis and management.	2.92	1.04	Disagree
9	Agricultural education students possessed innovative and creative thinking skills.	3.02	0.87	Agree
10	Agricultural education students possessed collaborative skills.	4.06	0.92	Agree

Source: *Researcher's Field Survey; 2020.*

distributed to the respondents by the researcher and one other research assistant, only 80 representing 93.0 % of the total number of questionnaires distributed were successfully retrieved and used for data analysis. Mean and standard deviation were the statistical tools used to analyze the research questions. The decision was that any item whose mean value was less than 3.00 was rejected while any item with a mean of 3.00 and above was accepted as a skill developed by vocational agricultural education university students for career advancements.

RESULTS

The results of the study were presented according to the research questions that guided the study as follows:

Research Question 1

What are the vocational skills possessed by Agricultural education university students for career advancement in Rivers State, Nigeria?

The data as presented in Table 1 shows that all the items constitute vocational skills developed by

agricultural education university students for career advancement in Rivers State. This is seen in mean values of the items which are all above the criterion mean of 3.00 except items 6 and 7 whose mean values are 2.88 and 2.91 respectively. Thus, agricultural education students do not possess adequate skills in horticulture and farm mechanization. Standard deviation values ranging from 0.78 to 1.21 shows homogeneity in the responses of the respondents.

Research Question 2

What are the entrepreneurship skills possessed by Agricultural education university students for career advancement in Rivers State, Nigeria?

The result as presented in Table 2 reveals that all the items constitute entrepreneurship skills developed by the university students through agricultural education. This is because the data indicated that all the items are above the criterion mean of 3.00 except items 3 and 8 having mean values 2.78 and 2.92 respectively. Thus, vocational agricultural education students do not possess financial accounting and data analysis and management skills as part of the entrepreneurship skills needed for their career advancement. Standard deviation values ranging from

Table 3. Teaching skills Possessed by Agricultural Education University Students for Career Advancement in Rivers State, Nigeria

S/N	Item	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Agricultural education students possessed classroom management skills.	4.22	1.62	Agree
2	Agricultural education students possessed motivational skills.	3.16	1.17	Agree
3	Agricultural education students possessed measurement and evaluation skills.	3.42	1.21	Agree
4	Agricultural education students possessed effective communication skills.	3.82	0.76	Agree
5	Agricultural education students possessed information and communication technology skills.	3.08	1.09	Agree
6	Agricultural education students possessed skill in educational research and development.	3.86	1.09	Agree
7	Agricultural education students possessed guidance and counseling skills.	4.08	0.87	Agree
8	Agricultural education students possessed skills in test construction and administration.	3.56	1.04	Agree
9	Agricultural education students possessed skills in logical reasoning.	4.02	0.78	Agree
10	Agricultural education students possessed skills in numeracy and quantitative reasoning.	3.14	0.92	Agree
11	Agricultural education students possessed skills in interpersonal relationship.	3.23	0.72	Agree
12	Agricultural education students possessed skills in improvising instructional aids.	3.06	1.03	Agree

Source: *Researcher's Field Survey; 2020.*

0.65 to 1.11 shows homogeneity in the responses of the respondents.

Research Question 3

What are the teaching skills possessed by Agricultural education university students for career advancement in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 3 shows that all the items as presented above are teaching skills acquired by agricultural education students through vocational agricultural education programmes of universities for their career advancement. This is evident from the mean values of the items which are all above the criterion mean of 3.00. Standard deviation values far and wide apart ranging from 0.72 to 1.62 indicated closeness in the responses of the respondents.

DISCUSSION

The result according Table 1 revealed that agricultural education university students acquired vocational skills in fish farming, poultry management, snail rearing, crop cultivation, pig rearing among others for their career advancement. This finding agrees with Abdulwahab (2006) who posits that vocational education is aimed at developing human capacities and competencies in knowledge, behaviours and skills so as to discharge more efficiently, their vocational activities in any occupational areas of choice. Similarly, this finding

agrees with Aina (2009) who reports that vocational education is targeted at building the skills and identities of students for successful careers in Agriculture and allied occupations. Furthermore, this finding shares a page with Ademu, et al (2018), who postulate that vocational skills offered and learnt in agricultural education programmes prepare students for meaningful participation in agriculture as well as offering them rare privileges to contribute meaningfully to the economic development of the country through their engagements in rewarding vocational careers upon graduation. Also, the finding corroborates the views of Cajethan and Benardine (2015) that essential skills applicable in crop farming, snail rearing, poultry farming, farm management techniques, goat farming among others are vocational skills acquired through Agricultural education which are capable of enhancing students career prospects in agriculture.

The result as presented in Table 2 shows that Agricultural education university students, acquire relevant entrepreneurship skills such as management, marketing, strategic planning, creativity and innovation, leadership among others capable of enhancing their self-reliance after their graduation in order to contribute meaningfully to the development of the nation. This finding is in line with the views of Duhu and Mbaga, (2016), reporting that entrepreneurship development achieved through vocational agricultural education programme of universities guarantees the advancement of the learners' competencies in knowledge, experience and attitudes for improved business performance in any chosen vocational careers of choice.

The result as indicated in Table 3 shows that agric-

ultural education programmes of universities inculcate in learners requisite teaching skills such as effective communication, classroom management, measurement and evaluation, discipline, motivation, research and development, test construction among others which if properly utilized can increase their chances of becoming successful agricultural educators and trainers in schools and colleges after graduation. This finding agrees with the views of Ogen (2007) who posits that the aim of agricultural education is to encourage students to develop skills, capabilities, potentials and other forms of behavior of positive value to the society for socio-economic transformation of the nation. In the same vein, the finding is in line with the objectives of Agricultural education that vocational agricultural education instills in students, relevant working skills for agricultural research and quality teaching for a rewarding educational careers (NPE, 2013). Thus, obtaining relevant working skills through agricultural education is a sure way to floating, maintaining and becoming successful in any agricultural careers of choice owing to its multifaceted nature.

CONCLUSION

Working skills are highly essential for anyone aiming at achieving career success in any vocational areas. Therefore, acquiring relevant vocational, entrepreneurship and teaching skills and competencies through vocational agricultural education is crucial for all prospective agricultural graduates, entrepreneurs and educators.

Based on the findings of the study as earlier discussed, the following recommendations were suggested:

1. Government should increase the funds available to vocational programmes of universities in order to meet the objectives of training students for career advancement.
2. Government should encourage graduates of agricultural education programmes to set up their own businesses so as to create jobs for themselves and others in order to reduce unemployment by giving them financial aids.
3. University authorities should encourage students to enroll in agricultural education programmes to increase their career choices since it has a multifaceted nature.
4. Students of vocational agricultural education should strive to float an agribusiness since it can serve as a complementary means of earning an income for economic development.

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