

**Graduates' Transition From Study to Employment: A Study of the Arts and
Agriculture Graduates of University of Nigeria in the World of Work**

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ABSTRACT

A tracer study of the graduates of the faculties of Agriculture and Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, was done to examine retrospective contribution of their education to their current work. The objectives of the study included (i) the determination of how the graduates got their first employment, (ii) factors for their being employed and (iii) the extent the knowledge acquired during study programme is used in current job, among others. A sample of 579 graduates from the population of the graduates from the population of the graduates of 1976-93 from the various study programmes in the two faculties were studied. Some of the principal findings indicated that more graduates got their first job by application to vacant positions and less so through personal contacts/connections. In a descending order of importance, knowledge of English, Science and technical knowledge of the field course work and practicals were major study elements used on the current job. Field of study, area of specialization, reputation of the university, personality and grades (class of pass) were similarly major contributors to being employed. Overall, nearly three-fourths of the graduates agreed that the knowledge and skills acquired during their studies were used to, at least, a great extent in their current jobs.

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INTRODUCTION

Transition from school to work is a crucial issue to fresh graduates, even though career decision is a lifelong process. According to Krumboltz (1979), career is a continually changing activity influenced by different factors. Concern about graduate unemployment is growing daily and at an accelerated rate in Nigeria, yet the strength of student enrollment and graduate output of the institutions of higher learning are growing rapidly. There is serious suspicion that the cause of high crime wave in Nigeria is due to high youth unemployment especially among the educated youths. Many of the graduates of the higher educational institution resent public service employment especially the teaching profession even though vacancies exist in such jobs at various levels. The common ambition of most fresh graduates is to be employed in the oil companies or the banks. These are popular because of their much higher pay. Many graduates are even willing to accept retraining in order to be employed in the oil company or the banks.

Constantly, calls have been made from different arms of the society for a look at the problem of youth unemployment in Nigeria. African universities have also been urged to make deliberate and concrete efforts towards the problem of education and employment after school. In recent years for instance emphasis has been on establishing Universities of Agriculture and strengthening the existing faculties of Agriculture. This is aimed at providing adequate raw materials for agro – and related industries besides providing sufficient food for the escalating population.

Job Placement

Some University students came into university as employees of establishments on in-service training. This category of students has the opportunity of going straight to a job immediately they graduate. Majority of the graduates who had no prior experience and

work may have some delay in entering the workforce. Observation suggests that employment opportunities for graduates are not mainly a function of the employment system and its requirement but also of the quantitative structural skill linkages. It has been noted as well that in many countries, the views and the reputation of certain institutions and departments influence the employability of their students. Hence, some institutions of higher learning try to maintain higher competitive edge for their graduates by including different professional experiences during the course of study, (Brennan, Kogan and Teichler 1996). Presently many youth are getting involved in post-compulsory vocational training (Teichler 1999). However, many big industries and other establishments will often train new entrants before placement on the job. In Nigeria, the oil companies, banks and some of the industries do train fresh graduates to acquire relevant skills before job placement – Induction training.

The observation is that employers' expectations are varied and cannot easily be determined because of the numerous factors that may influence the need for recruitment or the recruitment requirement. Because employers' views about the reputation of certain institutions and departments tend to influence recruitment, some institutions of higher education consequently try to ensure higher competitive edge for their graduates by establishing some direct professional experiences during the students' course of study (learning visits, internships). Some departments also establish special relationship with prospective employers of their graduates (Brennan Kogan and Teichler, 1996). In Nigeria, young graduates try to do their National Youth Service (NYSC) in the establishments they aim to be employed. The graduates try to impress the prospective employer during the one- year period of NYSC so as to have some edge over others during recruitment exercise.

Relevance/Relatedness of Education to Work

Education in Nigeria needs serious research attention to quite understand the existing relationship between schooling and work. Three major linkages have been identified by scholars, and these are:

- (i) the dimensions of higher education relevant to work such as the quantitative and structural, curriculum and training as well as socialization, education provision and student option;
- (ii) the linkage between education and work, for example, the labour market and life long education and;
- (iii) the dimensions of work relevant to education such as employment career, work task and requirement and quality of work (Brennan Lyan, Schomburg and Teichler, 1996)

Often, employers' priority determine the importance of certain educational skills to job. Manpower projection has been used by some of the developed countries to determine corresponding educational need of the labour force and the worker before employment (Levin 1995). In other words, the quality of education may determine the quality of the worker's performance. Hence, skills acquired during course of study are expected to match labour market skills demand; to encourage equity between education and work (World Bank, 1991).

Besides, UNESCO (1990) observed that some African countries which, of course, include Nigeria have unemployment situations which may have been caused by over-production of graduates compared to the labour force needs. There is, thus, the need to study education and work in these countries, (UNESCO, 1990). Further, education has numerous social benefits in African countries than can be imagined. The contributions of education can be considered in terms of various dimensions of social welfare function as

well as civil point of view, which include socializing the people into western civilization and modern technology. In this study however, attempt has been made to determine recruitment criteria and how fresh graduates got their first job. Also examined were important criteria for being employed as well as the extent the knowledge acquired during the study programme was being used by the graduates in their current jobs.

METHODOLOGY

The study population was all the students of the faculties of Arts and Agriculture in the University of Nigeria who graduated between 1984 and 1993. The convocation list, was secured from each department for the respective years. Alumni officers were consulted to assist the researchers secure known addresses of the graduates in various towns and cities in southern Nigeria. Alumni Secretaries in the cities where Alumni associations exist were contacted by writing and also visited. About one thousand four hundred (1400) addresses of the graduates within the study population were secured. The convocation lists showed that graduates in the two faculties between 1984 and 1994 were about three thousand, four hundred and fifty-one (3,451). This was determined using convocation registers obtained from the faculty and departmental offices.

Using the list compiled from the convocation registers, a random sampling of 720 graduates was done. The aim was to obtain equal sub-sample from each study programme. Research assistants were advised to also secure on-the-spot addresses of the sampled graduates in various locations. Six hundred and twenty-six (626) out of 720 sampled were reached. However, 579 questionnaires were found useful for the analysis.

The standard instrument for graduate survey by Schomburg (1995) was used. A few items were restructured to suit the survey environment and the study objective. Also, items addressing small-business concepts were included in order to address the research

special interest area. The instrument was pilot-tested on 40 graduates of the University of Nigeria working in different establishments. Remarks and suggestions by the pilot-test subjects were used to improve the instrument. Also, it was sent to the project adviser for comments and input. Putting all the feed-back together, the final form of the instrument was produced.

Copies of the survey instruments were distributed to the respondents using the following approaches

- (i) the Alumni Relations Office at the University of Nigeria wrote the various Alumni branch chairmen to alert the respective respondents;
- (ii) the Principal Investigator (PI) then visited the branches across the southern part of the country – Ibadan, Port –Harcourt, Warri, Benin Owerri, Aba, Umuahia, Lagos, among others – to drop the questionnaire and to meet with the branch executives. The PI was assisted in this exercise by the research assistants. Branch chairmen were requested to retrieve completed questionnaires and return them through pre-paid motor courier. In addition and to ensure a good rate of return, some research assistants were sent to deliver and retrieve completed questionnaires, especially from respondents residing in other than the major cities. This was necessary in order to ensure adequate coverage of all the sampled respondents.

As would be expected in this type of survey, not all the sampled graduates could be located in the business addresses available, mainly because they had relocated. Such cases were replaced with other subjects drawn from the original list. It is not customary in Nigeria for people to leave forwarding addresses when relocating. Our sample, however, ensured that the male: female enrolment ratios over the study period were approximately similar to the ratios in the convocation record.

FINDINGS

General biography of the respondents

It is believed generally that people engage in educational pursuits principally for two major reasons:

- (i) to bring themselves up-to-date in a desired area of knowledge in order to achieve some intrinsic satisfaction and/or
- (ii) to be able to secure employment in areas directly or indirectly related to their major subjects of learning. In the later situation, the objective is to secure well-paying jobs necessary for survival of the individual.

In this section, some aspects of the respondents' biography are presented. The results of the data analysis indicated that the respondents were still in their professionally active years, and within an age range of 32-55 years. Three-fourths were male. Approximately 30% had some pre-enrolment training; an equal proportion was employed prior to their first enrolment in the University. Eighty percent enrolled with the basic entry qualification of West African School Certificate (WASC), or its equivalent, the ordinary level General Certificate of Education (GCE O-Level). Other qualifications for enrolment in universities in Nigeria are those that qualify the candidate for direct entry and include the GCE advanced level pass, the ordinary and higher national diploma, and the Nigerian certificate of Education (NCE), among others.

Mode of first Employment after Graduation

Several approaches are used to seek for and secure employment upon graduation from a university in Nigeria. Graduates may choose to apply for advertised jobs, unadvertised jobs or start own private business. Jobs may be secured in the private or public sector. In this study, the respondents were asked to indicate how they secured their first post-graduation employment.

The distribution of the responses is presented in Table 1 by year of graduation ranges. The table indicates that overall, the most common means of first employment is by application to vacant position (43%) which has tended to be dropping in popularity as the years have progressed; since 52% of those who graduated in the years 1976 – 85 got their first employment by application to vacant positions while 30% did so in 1993. Personal connection/contacts is about second (23%). However influences of parents or relatives (16%) which is closely related to personal connection is the third in the order of importance. In the past, several prospective employers used to interview graduating students on-campus. This practice has dropped to almost zero. Thus, the campus “employers” visit, and the “university placement office” as avenues of getting first employment are almost non-existent. Public employment agency (12%) appears to be more important means of graduate employment than university placement office.

Table 1: Strategies for Seeking Employment (percent; multiple responses)

Strategy	Year of graduation (Bachelor)				Total
	76-84	86-89	90-92	93+	
Application to vacant position	52	46	40	32	43
Personal connections/contact	21	22	32	12	23
Through parents/relatives' help	18	14	15	17	16
The employer offered me vacancy	16	12	14	7	13
Public employment agency	19	14	10	5	12
I am working for same employer as I did before my studies	15	13	11	9	12
I set up my own employment/was self-employed	4	3	11	22	10
Contacting employers without knowing about vacancy	13	9	10	5	9
Private employment agency	7	5	9	7	7
Contacts established with employers through work experience in the course of study	10	8	6	3	7
My own advertisement	4	6	9	3	6
Manpower allocation	6	5	4	3	5
I have not yet found any employment	3	4	3	10	5
University's Teaching Staff	3	5	4	5	4
Joining the enterprise of my parents/relatives	1	2	6	4	3
Employers' campus visits	0	0	1	1	1
University's Placement Office	0	0	1	0	0
Total	196	170	189	146	177
Count (n)	(113)	(131)	(146)	(104)	(494)

Question: How did you get your first employment after graduation? Multiple reply possible

Nearly three-fourths of the respondents started to seek for employment after graduation (Table 2). Approximately one-fifth of the respondents did not bother to seek for employment. Only 8% sought for employment before graduation. During the period, 84% of the graduates sought for paid employment, while the proportion was 75% respectively in the periods 1986 – 89 and 1990 – 92. By 1993 71% sought for paid employment. The proportion that did not bother to seek employment increased from 12% to 29%, showing that more graduates tended to establish own business than hitherto.

Table 2: Time of Start of Search for Employment (percent)

	Year of graduation (Bachelor)				Total
	76-84	86-89	90-92	93+	
Before graduation	4	11	8	8	8
After graduation	84	75	75	71	73
I did not seek employment	12	14	14	29	19
Other	0	0	1	1	0
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Count (n)	(105)	(122)	(147)	(101)	(475)

Question: When did you start seeking for job?

Important Factors for Being Employed

The respondents' rating of important factors for being employed is presented in Table 3. As would be expected, the ratings indicated field of study as the most important criterion for being employed (78%). The next most highly rated factor was the subject area of specialization (61%) which is closely related to field of study. Other important criteria were the reputation of the university (57%), the individual personality (54%), and the grade (52%). The theme of thesis appears to be of little importance.

Table 3: Recruitment Criteria of the Employer by year of graduation (percent; responses 1 and 2)

	Year of graduation (Bachelor)				Total
	76-84	86-89	90-92	93+	
Field of study	84	79	75	72	78
Main focus of subject area specialization	67	60	58	57	61
Reputation of University	57	56	60	54	57
Personality	47	54	57	56	54
Grades of University	55	52	54	46	52
Reputation of Department	35	34	32	38	35
Previous work experience	29	35	27	28	30
Theme of thesis-project if applicable	15	12	14	16	14
My own world view, religion etc	10	10	9	12	10
Experience abroad	6	11	4	3	6
Count (n)	(108)	(122)	(128)	(85)	(443)

Question: In your opinion, how important were the following factors for being employed?

Scale from 1 = very important to 5 = not at all important

Post-Recruitment Training

Quite often an important factor for being employed is the ability of the prospective trainee to respond positively to induction training following employment. The respondents were therefore asked to indicate whether or not they had any post-recruitment training and if any what types. The distribution of the responses is presented in Table 4 by year of graduation only. The table indicates that 46% received no training at all; 44% trained on-the-job; only 6% received any formal training. Of those who received training at all, 43% was on-the-job, 18% was by postgraduate studies, 16% was through workshops, and 14% was by in-service training (Table 4b).

Table 4: Initial Training After Graduation by year of graduation (percent)

	Year of graduation (Bachelor)				Total
	76-84	86-89	90-92	93+	
No training	40	45	51	45	46
Only on the job training	49	44	39	45	44
Training included off-job courses etc	7	7	4	6	6
Others	4	4	5	4	4
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Count (n)	(114)	(128)	(137)	(94)	(473)
Type/name of initial training					
Postgraduate studies	32	28	0	7	18
In-service training	5	16	17	21	14
On-the-job	47	40	44	43	43
Workshops	16	8	28	14	16
Correspondence	0	0	0	7	1
Private tutor	0	8	11	7	7
Total	100	100	100	100	100
Count (n)	(19)	(25)	(18)	(14)	(76)

Question: How many kinds of initial training did you receive for your first job after graduation?

Extent to which Knowledge Acquired during Studies is Used in Current Job.

Under normal circumstances, graduates tend to secure employment in areas related to their academic disciplines. Quite often, however, individual graduates may find themselves working in areas quite unrelated to their disciplines principally because of dearth of appropriate jobs. The different study areas create opportunities for getting appropriate jobs.

The extent to which the respondents indicated they used the knowledge and skills acquired from specific study areas and subjects in their current jobs is presented in Table 5. According to the table, knowledge of English (78%) scientific and technical knowledge (69%), and theory and course content (64%) rank the highest in the respondents' opinion. Lectures (61%), practicals and assignment (58%), and library facilities (51%) come next in importance. It is not a surprise that knowledge of English was rated the highest since it is the medium of instruction in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Table 5: Use of Professional Knowledge and Skills Acquired During Studies by Faculty (percent; responses 1 and 2)

	Faculty			
	Arts	Agric	Education	Total
Knowledge of English	81	73	81	78
Science and technical knowledge of my field of study	57	79	76	69
Theory and content of my course work	57	68	78	64
Lectures	56	63	73	61
Practicals and assignment	49	63	73	58
Library references and literature search	38	53	57	51
Economic (Finance, costing etc)	45	55	50	50
Social Sciences and Psychology course	46	39	54	44
General studies	44	36	54	42
Workshop and demonstrations	41	40	45	41
General faculty courses	36	39	52	39
Laboratory work and laboratory expenses	29	43	36	36
Field Trips and Excursions	40	29	45	36
Final year project	31	39	42	36
Contact with academic staff or academic adviser	26	33	52	33
Exhibitions	34	28	31	31
Natural sciences (Physics, Chemistry	27	28	13	26
Any other	36	26	44	34
Count (n)	(197)	(155)	(61)	(413)

Question: To what extent do you use knowledge acquired during your studies in the following areas (if applicable) for your current job?

Scale from 1 = to a very high extent to 5 = not at all.

Usefulness of some Elements in Current Work

The respondents' rating of the usefulness of some study elements in their current work (Table 6) indicated course content of major as the most useful (80%). Practical emphasis in teaching and learning is the second most useful study element (68%). There is an indication here that emphasizing the practicals during lectures tend to aid both teaching and learning as well as their usefulness in the world of work. Table 6 shows that this emphasis had remained relatively same over the study period. Opportunity for specialization is rated third most useful study element (66%) while work experience was fourth (66%).

Table 6: Rating of the Useful Elements of Study Programme in Current Work (percent; responses 1 and 2).

	Year of graduation (Bachelor)				Total
	76-85	86-89	90-92	93+	
Course content of major	85	82	77	72	80
Practical emphasis of teaching and learning	70	73	66	60	68
Opportunity for specialization	73	64	63	63	66
Work experience (internship etc)	66	73	70	52	66
Research emphasis	70	58	58	44	58
Variety of courses offered	62	57	54	55	57
Electives course	53	55	45	45	49
Count (n)	(105)	(124)	(132)	(85)	(446)

Question: How useful did the following elements of the program contribute to your current work?

Scale from 1 = very useful to 5 = not at all useful.

Rating of Use of Knowledge and Skills Acquired During Study Programme in Current Job

The respondents were asked to indicate their overall rating of the extent to which the knowledge and skills acquired during studies were used in current job. The distribution of the responses (Table 7) suggests that 70% (responses 1 and 2) rated the extent of use of the acquired knowledge and skills as high. This result is quite satisfactory because it indicates that the academic programme of the University of Nigeria is quite relevant, at least in the areas under study. The arithmetic mean which appears at the bottom of table confirms this response. On a descending order of 1 –5 (where 1 = very high and 5 = not all), an overall rating of 2 is quite high. Further examination of the table indicates a decreasing trend in the rating from '76 –85 period through '93 +, 80% in 76 – 85 and 63% in 1993 + (responses 1 and 2), a situation resulting from scarcity of jobs which forces many graduates to work in areas often unrelated to their major areas of study.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study aimed at determining

1. how students of two major faculties in the university of Nigeria got their first jobs upon graduation;
2. the factors they considered as the important criteria for being employed and
3. the extent the knowledge and skills they acquired during studies was used in current employment.

In addition, the study examined (4) aspects of the biography of the respondents. Students who graduated between 1984/85 and 1993/94 were surveyed. This report is part of a larger tracer study sponsored by the Association of African Universities (AAU).

A survey instrument adapted from Schomburg (1995) was used to compile the data.

Highlights of the findings indicated that the greater proportion of the graduates got their first employment by applying to vacant positions. Personal contacts and connections was the next most important source of first employment. Influence of parents (which is related to personal connections) was the third most important. University Placement Office, as well as campus visits of prospective employers, major previous avenues of on-campus employment, were the least important avenues for first employments

Most of the graduates (almost three-fourths) started their first job search after graduation. The rest were divided between the categories that started their first job search prior to graduation and those that did not seek employment.

The respondents' perception of the five most important criteria for being employed were in a descending order, field of study, the major area of study, the reputation of the university, personality of the respective graduate, and the class of pass (grades). In addition, formal post-employment training was very minimal; most of the graduates either did not have any training at all or trained on-the-job.

Knowledge of English language, technical knowledge of major field of study, adequate comprehension of the theory and content of course work, as well as formal lectures, and practicals were considered the five most important specific areas which enhanced the respondents' on-the-job skills. In general, however, the respondents considered course content of major field, practical emphasis on teaching and learning, as well as opportunity for specialization, and work experience as most relevant in their current employment.

Overall, most of the respondents agreed they applied, to a high extent, all the knowledge and skills acquired during studies. In other words, the knowledge and skills imparted to graduates of the respective faculties were very relevant in their employment.

Conclusion

The quest for higher education in Nigeria increased almost exponentially in the last quarter of the last century. This, to a lesser extent, would be true of many other African countries such as Kenya, Uganda, South Africa and Tanzania. Besides, a large number of prospective students also leave these and other countries for studies overseas principally because, in recent years, the governments do not have sufficient resources for staff development and teaching (Court, 1991). Fortunately, some of the universities still have their old teaching staff and surviving laboratories to sustain fairly above- average academic excellence and high student achievement.

The University of Nigeria is one of the first generation universities that fall into this category, the continuing dilapidation of its academic and related facilities notwithstanding. With increasing enrollment in universities, there is need for creating more opportunities for graduates to be employed in areas where knowledge and skills acquired in studies can be put to more creative use, situations where university education becomes more relevant in the world of work.

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