

COMPETENCY LEVEL OF FRESH GRADUATES OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES IN EMPLOYMENT SURVIVAL SKILLS

by

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Abstract

Graduates of Nigerian universities are expected to acquire competency in survival skills that will see them through working life. In these days of world economic meltdown, it has become imperative that graduates should possess adequate competency in survival skills to enhance their employability in the world of work. In Nigeria at present, there is high graduate unemployment rate and so fresh graduates would gladly make do with any job opportunities that come their way. To cope with such jobs, the fresh graduate needs to possess some level of competency in employment survival skills. However, there is also growing concern among the populace and especially among prospective employers of labour that the fresh graduate of Nigerian universities is not adequately prepared for the challenges of employment. The paper therefore, investigates the competency level of fresh graduates of Nigerian universities in employment survival skills. Survey design of the ex-post facto type was adopted. The questionnaire instrument was used for data collection and contains largely survival skills question. Simple random sampling technique was adopted to select 200 fresh graduates out of a population of about 2,000 fresh graduates of Nigerian universities at the National Youth Service Corps orientation camp in Ogun State in April, 2014. The participants are graduates from universities across the country. Four research questions were answered in the study using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The result shows that 140 (70%) possessed high competency level in survival skills, 49 (24.5%) possessed medium competency level in survival skills while 11 (4.5%) possessed low

competency level in survival skills. There was no significant difference in level of competency in survival skills possessed according to gender. Competency level of fresh graduates in survival skill with science background was significantly higher than those of graduates from non-science based disciplines. The result also showed that the fresh graduates from universities in South-East and South-South geopolitical zones of Nigeria possessed higher competency in survival skills than their counterparts in the other geopolitical zones. The paper concludes that fresh graduates of Nigerian universities generally possess sufficient survival skills for employment.

Key words: competency level; Fresh graduates of Nigerian universities; Employment survival skills,

Introduction

Education is not only preparation for life but also life itself (John Dewey, 1959). When I watch kids' walk into the building on their first day of school; I think about what I want them to be like on their last day. I also think about what I want them to be like on the day I bump into them in the supermarket, ten or twenty years later. Over the course of three decades watching kids walk into schools, one thing is certain that one wants them to be: lifelong learners; be passionate; be ready to take risks; be able to solve problems and think critically; be able to look at things differently; be able to work independently and with others, be creative, care and want to give back to their community, persevere, have integrity and self-respect, have moral courage, be able to use the world around them well, read well and work well with numbers.

In the goals of education, students are expected to learn to use the resources around them, read or see something they are interested in and follow upon it, they are expected to have an idea and get on the phone and call people they can talk to about it, or pick up a book and read more about it, or sit down and write about it. In looking at the goals of education, one cannot help but begin to imagine a student as a thinker and a doer, someone who follows his/her passions, an

adult who is strong enough to stand up and speak for what he/she wants and believes, and who cares about him/herself and the world, someone who understands him/herself and understands learning. Creativity, passion, courage and perseverance are the personal qualities one wants to see in graduates. For Robinson (2010) when students leave school, they are expected to have the basic life skills that will help them get along in the society e.g. knowing how to act in a meeting or how to keep her life and work organized.

Nigeria's philosophy of education believes that education is an instrument for national development and the interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education; Education fosters the worth and development of the individual, for each individual's sake, and for general development of the society. The training of the mind in the understanding of the world around us should to gain the acquisition of appropriate skills and competences as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society. In consequence, the quality of instruction at all levels has to be oriented towards inculcating the following values:

Education shall continue to be highly rated in the national development plans of every country because education is the most important instrument of change. Any fundamental change in the intellectual and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by education. It is education will prepare the individual for citizenship, cultivate a skilled workforce, teach cultural literacy, help the students become critical thinkers and help the student compete in a global market place and also be able to survive any kind of situation they find themselves after their interaction with school, (Raven & Stephenson, 2001).

It is expected that a fresh student of a university and college is someone who has already built a character, developed intellectual, physical and creative abilities to the highest level which will now her to survive any harsh situation she finds herself making use of the basic survival skills acquired by the fresh graduate. Education goals should, therefore, create an environment of academic excellence to ensure that each graduate is thoroughly prepared for studies. This is

accrued through a challenging and globally inspired curriculum that provides a sound knowledge base in the liberal arts, mathematics and science.

University education is expected to develop independent and articulate communicators who are critical thinkers, collaborative, innovative, analytical and able to solve problems. It is also expected to place a strong emphasis on character and citizenship education and provide experiences in life skills, leadership and service; foster and promote emotional social and physical well-being through strong athletic and wellness programmes; develop student creativity through engagement in the arts with a comprehensive and vibrant arts programme and explore emerging technologies and opportunities that will enhance the school's programmes and expand the students' related capabilities.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the unemployment rate in Nigeria in 2010 was 21.1%. It increased to 23.9% in 2011 and Sky-rocketed to an alarming 54% in 2012. The disturbing rate of youth unemployment was evident in the recent ill-fated recruitment exercise by the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) where no fewer than 500,000 youths turned up for a recruitment exercise to fill less than 5,000 vacancies in the service. The number of unemployed graduates in the labour market is alarming but more alarming and disturbing is the quality of these graduates. Recently, Nwokoma (2015) in the Guardian newspaper lamented over the quality of graduates who apply for jobs in the industries. He lamented over the poor quality of graduates from Nigerian universities, and blamed it on the federal government's inability to invest heavily in universities' infrastructure, to improve quality in Nigerian institutions, and so challenged the government to do something in that direction, so as to improve the quality of Nigerian graduates.

According to Oxford Advanced learners dictionary, an unemployed graduate refers to someone that lacks the skills and qualities needed to get a job upon having a university degree or

upon completion of tertiary education. They do not have the needed skills for the job and so be able to survive in odd situations.

Survival skills are techniques and strategies a person may use to escape from trouble in a dangerous situation like natural disasters. Having survival skills will shape you into a different person, one who is more self-reliant and who knows that he doesn't necessarily need to rely upon all our modern systems of infrastructure to survive. Survival skills also include having an open mind, a logical mind, a thinking mind and a mind with practical experiences, as they will also enable one to adapt. According to Krieger (2011), adapting is probably the greatest survival skill of all.

Ken (2014) avers that survival skills include the combined knowledge and abilities of methods and techniques that will be used in situations where modern conveniences and infrastructures don't exist or have been damaged. Survival skills are typically thought of in the context of wilderness survival. However, the term is a very broad and general one, and applies to many 'levels' of survival, from the simple ability to cook one's own food, build one's own shelter, and survive in the labour market in the face of unemployment. High level of competence is actually required for one to be able to survive in difficult situations. Competency is a set of defined behaviours that provide a structural guide enabling the identification, evaluation and development of the behaviours in individual employee. In summary, competence can be seen as a person's ability or capability to do a job and do it well. Lack of competency in survival skills by fresh graduates would render them unemployable thereby compounding the problem of unemployment that has bedevilled our country, Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

The global economic meltdown has heightened the problem of graduate unemployment in Nigeria and this could create social unrest and result in low Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The situation is such that every fresh graduate of Nigerian universities would willingly take up

any employment opportunity irrespective of its relatedness to the degree earned. This development underscores the need for fresh graduates of Nigerian universities to possess a high level of employment survival skills that will also enhance their adaptability and resourcefulness in a difficult job situation. In recent times, the populace, especially the employers of labour in Nigeria have expressed concern about the level of skills possessed by the fresh graduates **ipso facto**, their employability. As important as the concern may be, any policy to redress the perceived low survival skills of the fresh graduates will, at best be based on mere speculation. It is, therefore, necessary to investigate the level of survival skill competency of fresh graduates of Nigerian universities in employment.

Objective of the Study

The general objective of the study is to evaluate the competency level of fresh graduates survival skills in employment. The specific objectives are to:

- i. determine the competency level of fresh graduates survival skills in employment;
- ii. compare survival skills of fresh graduates according to gender
- iii. compare survival skills of fresh graduates between science and non science based disciplines and
- iv. compare survival skills of fresh graduates across geo political zones in Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study has provided answers to the following research questions:

- i. what are the levels of competency attainment of fresh graduates of Nigerian survival skills in Nigeria?
- ii to what extent is the competency attainment of male graduate different from that of female graduate in terms of expectations in survival skills?

- iii. to what extent is the competency attainment of fresh graduates from science background different from those in the arts, social science, vocational etc in terms of expectations in survival skills?
- iv. to what extent is the competency attainment of fresh graduate from one geopolitical zone in Nigeria different from the others in terms of expectations in survival skills?

Literature Review

Every job has a requirement of specific set of competencies to undertake it efficiently, and the individuals who would perform the job need to be laced with those competencies. One of the interesting and worth mentioning aspect of this term is that it focuses not on what a person can do but on what a person can do but on what a person can learn. This forward looking approach makes it quite popular amongst training providers and recruitment experts. Competencies with their specific behavioural indicators facilitate the demonstration of appropriate skills and behaviours, it is not a set of tasks performed like a robot neither it is an underlying capacity which is never demonstrated. Competency also includes motivation and self-knowledge, a desire and willingness to demonstrate effective performance. Competence is the ability of an individual to do job properly. The term, competence, first appeared in an article authored by R.W. White in 1959 as a concept for performance motivation. Later in 1972, Cvang C. Lundberg defined the concept in ‘’planning the executive development programme’’. The term gained attraction when in 1973, David McClelland wrote a seminar paper entitled ‘‘Testing for competence rather than for intelligence’’. Gilbert (1978) used the concept of competence in relationship to performance.

Some scholars see ‘‘competence’’ as a combination of practical and theoretical knowledge, cognitive skill, behaviour and values used to improve performance; or as the state or quality of being adequately or well qualified having the ability to perform a specific role. For instance, management competency might include systems thinking and emotional intelligence

and skills in influence and negotiation. Competence is also used as a more general description of the requirements of human beings in organisations and communities, Competency is sometimes thought of as being shown in action in a situation and context that might be different the next time a person has to act in emergencies. Competent people may react to a situation following behaviours they have previously found to succeed.

According to Atherton (2003) competency is the ability to perform the requisite range of skills for practice. To be competent, a person would need to be able to interpret the situation in the context and to have a repertoire of possible actions to take and have trained in the possible actions in the repertoire. Competency usually grows through experience and the extent of an individual to learn and adapt. Competences are also what people need to be useful in their jobs. Job competences are not the same as job task. Competencies include all the related knowledge, skills, abilities and attributes that form a person's job. Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) however, introduced nomenclature for the levels of competence in competency development, and the five levels are:

1. Novice: Rule-based behaviour, strongly limited and inflexible.
2. Experienced beginner: incorporates aspects of the situation.
3. Practitioner: Acting consciously from long-term goals and plan.
4. Knowledgeable practitioner: sees the situation as a whole and act from personal conviction
5. Experts: has an intuitive understanding of the situation and zooms in on the central aspects.

According to Dreyfus (2013) competence can be seen as a cluster of related abilities, commitments, knowledge and skills that enable a person or an organisation to act effectively in a job or situation. Competence indicates a sufficiency of knowledge and skills that enable someone to act in a wide variety of situations. Competence according to Pearson (2011) is the capability to

apply or use a set of related knowledge, skills and abilities required to successfully perform “critical work functions” or tasks in a defined work setting. It can also be defined as a set of individual performance behaviours which are observable, measurable and critical to successful individual and company performance. According to Ta-Nehisi (2011) competence is also seen as individual characteristics of a person which result in an effective and superior performance in a job.

Competencies often serve as the basis for skill standards that specify the level of knowledge, skills and abilities required for success in the workplace as well as potential measurement criteria for accessing competency attainment. Competency utilizes appropriate methods for interacting sensitively, effectively and professionally with persons from diverse cultural, socioeconomic, educational, racial, ethnic and professional backgrounds and persons of all ages and lifestyle preferences (competency from: Council on linkages between academia and public health practice).

Disaster and emergency situations are an inevitable part of human life. It is how we respond to such situations that plays a major factor on our survival. Science is very important in the everyday life of human beings in their quest for survival. According to Cook (2014), Science class provides students with essential skills and knowledge for later life. Students who do well in science can go on to productive careers in engineering, medicine and other innovative fields. A science education provides students of all ages with skills that apply in other fields as well and help students succeed in other areas of life. Learning science provides the students with the knowledge of how to overcome environmental challenges and the need for conservation efforts. The more exposure to science, the more comfortable they will feel using it in their daily lives to address human challenges.

According to Churchill (1989), science teaches students to follow logical process to solve a problem, such problems as real-world careers and even family relationships. In survival skills,

we apply scientific strategies, knowledge and skills to overcome challenges. Through the study of science, students are able to develop these survival skills which will help them to overcome disasters in their daily lives. Survival skills also include the combined knowledge and abilities of methods and techniques that will be used in situations where modern conveniences and infrastructures do not exist or have been damaged. To have survival skills, you first examine what it is that you are changed to, the things that are holding you down, figure out ways to break the chains, figure out all alternative ways, think about the skills that you believe would help you to be more self-reliant and start learning them, bearing in mind that the best way to learn anything is to do it. You may have all the knowledge about prepping but as we all know, a disaster can change everything in an instant and one may be forced to survive without one's emergency survival kits. Without the right skills for survival, one's chances of surviving a disaster or emergency situation will be greatly affected. It is important to understand that because of modern commodities, our knowledge for basic survival has greatly diminished. This will basically have a negative effect on our fresh graduates in an extended disaster survival situation and can mean the difference between life and death. Hence, there are some basic survival skills that fresh graduates need to learn in order to ensure their chances of survival in the work place.

They include:

1. Learn how to grow food and find it, in order to survive from hunger and starvation.
2. Obtain water and purify it: This is in, fact, the most important skill everyone should learn in order to survive. Knowing how to purify water is also very important to ensure that it is clean and portable.
3. Learn the art of clothing repair: One needs to master this skill as clothing is one of the most important elements that ensure chances of survival.
4. Learn basic grooming skills: Basic grooming skills are very important to learn to keep you and your family clean and healthy in a survival situation. Keep in mind that

being healthy is one of the most important factors in ensuring your survival and that of your family.

5. Learn first aid: During a disaster situation you cannot expect to get medical professional help so it is important to know how to treat yourself and others as it will be your only chance in an emergency situation.
6. How to start and maintain a fire: This is one of the most essential skills you need to learn in order to ensure your survival either indoors or outdoors. Learning how to start a fire and have it going when you need it can mean the difference between life and death in survival situation.
7. Learn how to defend yourself and be willing to do it: Owning a firearm and knowing how to use it is one of the most basic things to learn to ensure that you are able to protect yourself and your family in an emergency situation. Defending yourselves with clubs, knives are basic hand to hand combat are also necessary skills to learn.
8. Learn and train your mind to expect the totally unexpected: Disaster situations can change everything in an instant, but no matter how much we know, this actual disaster and survival events will surely freak us out. Training ourselves to prepare and practice all sorts of drills for various horrors is a great way to prepare us for such situations. You also have to keep in mind that there will always be a big possibility of something strange, weird and frightening things to happen when in a survival situation; by doing this you will eventually condition your mind to accept such scenarios.
9. Understand the world and potential disasters that await: Keep in mind that timing is everything and knowing how to react and respond properly to disaster or pending disasters can mean the difference between life and death. This can be done by monitoring the world and local news and be informed and aware to see a situation developing and act

on it before it actually occurs. It is important to understand that knowledge plays a vital part in ensuring your survival.

10. Learn and condition yourself into a survival mentality: Everyone has to learn the skill of scrounging around and finding what they need. You must learn to see in your mind that certain items can be very useful for your survival. Having a survival mentality will greatly increase your chance in finding solutions to problems that will surely occur in a survival situation.

Survival skills are techniques a person may use in a dangerous situation (e.g. natural disasters) to save themselves and others. These techniques are meant to provide basic necessities for human life, water, food and clothing.

Acquiring certifications and vocational skills is another escape route out of unemployability. The tertiary institutions in Nigeria should incorporate, at least, one vocational skill into the training of each undergraduate, irrespective of the student's discipline. This will open up more chances of employment or self-employment for the graduates. Undergraduates must also wake up to the reality that things have changed from what they used to be in the past. The labour market is highly competitive and it takes those who are trained and retrained to cut the needed edge. Unemployment which is part of the by-product of lack of survival skills among fresh graduates is indeed a ticking time bomb which if not defused on time can cause havoc in the nearest future. All hands must be on deck to rescue our falling ivory towers. While waiting for the 'Moses' that will take our educational system out of 'Egypt' to the 'promised land'. Our undergraduates must also wake up to the grim reality on hand and take their destinies in their hands.

Concerning the condition of learning, lack of constant electricity, dilapidated lecture theatres, lack of functional laboratories and enough practical experience has its own effects on graduates produced and ultimately their ability to meet the demands of employers and so survive

in our ever challenging world. This problem of unemployment among the Nigerian graduates has been of great concern to both the fresh graduates and the society at large. This situation is in fact of great concern to our fresh graduates to the extent that hundreds of unemployed university graduates mounted a demonstration in front of the presidential offices in Abuja in year 2000, demanding that government provide them with jobs.

According to Chiemeka (2009), employers complain that graduates are poorly prepared for work. They believe that academic standards have fallen considerably over the past decade and that a university degree or a polytechnic diploma is no longer a guarantee of communication skill or technical competence. According to Andrew, Bankole and Olatunde (2000), a large mismatch appears to exist between university output and labour market demand. At the same time, their findings show that the employment prospect of recent graduates have clearly deteriorated, primarily because of the weak Nigerian economy, the policy environment, and inadequate level of skilled human resources, especially the quality of the university trained portion of the work force.

To ameliorate this poor situation of unemployment among fresh graduates, Ibanga (2015) have now suggested remedies which includes among others: increased funding, university autonomy, scrapping of the Joint Matriculation Board (JAMB), improved conditions of services for the university lectures, better supervision by NUC, provision of study facilities, infrastructural revamp etc.

Methodology

This study was conducted as a sample survey covering all the 36 states and the federal capital territory. The target population was the fresh graduates at the orientation camp who have just concluded their university programme. The survey involved the use of questionnaire containing survival skills achievement questions.

Sample Design: A simple random sampling technique was adopted. The survey design provided a basis for valid generalisation and the result obtained using the selected samples could be used to represent the entire population of the fresh Nigerian graduates. From the samples used about 20% of the fresh graduates were made to represent the total population. The ratio of gender was also on the basis of proportion as they are found in the NYSC camp. The survival skill achievement test items were curriculum referenced and developed by the researcher.

The instrument was also subjected to face and content validity by experts in measurement and evaluation; and also pre tested using final year students from university of Ibadan. Following the findings from the pre-test, the test instrument was reviewed and the internal consistency and the validity yielded the value of .80 using Kuder-Richardson Formula 20. The items were generated on the basis of a table of specification covering different content areas and three levels of cognitive operations namely, knowledge understanding and application based on bloom's taxonomy (Bloom, 1956).

The instrument was administered to the fresh graduates on orientation camps. The entire field exercise was carried out in ten days. Two research assistants were involved by the researcher to collect the needed information from the fresh graduates. Descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used for the data analysis.

Results and Discussion

The results have been presented and discussed in order of the research questions

Research Question 1

What are the levels of competency attainment of fresh graduates of Nigerian universities in survival skills in employment?

In answering this research question, students' responses in the survival skills were graded and used for analysis. Frequency distribution of the responses are presented in Table 1

The fresh graduates competency attainment was grouped under three levels viz: novice or foundational, intermediate and proficiency competency attainment survival skills in employment. Scores between 1.0 and 29.0 are rated as having novice competency level, scores between 35.5 and 62.0 are having intermediate competency level, while scores between 70.5 and 100.0 possess proficient competency level.

Table 1

Frequency Distribution of Students' Performance in survival Skills

Score	Frequency	Percent	Proficiency Level
4	2	1.0	
6	1	5.0	
7	2	1.0	
8	4	2.0	
9	1	0.5	
10	1	0.5	
11	4	2.0	Novice/
12	5	2.5	Foundational
13	3	1.5	
14	13	6.5	
15	1	0.5	
16	11	5.5	
17	10	5.0	
18	13	6.5	Intermediate
19	16	8.0	
20	22	11.0	

21	15	7.5	
22	17	8.5	
23	13	6.5	
24	26	13.0	
25	10	5.0	Proficient
26	8	4.0	
27	2	1.0	
Total	200	100.0	

Eleven fresh graduates are novices in competency level, attainment in survival skills, 49 fresh graduates have intermediate competency level attainment in survival skill, while 140 fresh graduates have proficient level attainment in survival skills.

Research Question 2

To what extent is the competency attainment of male graduates different from that of the female graduates in terms of expectations in survival skills?

With regard to the gender of the respondents, Table 2 shows that the percentage of male and female respondents is closely matched at 51 percent and 49 percent respectively.

Table 2

Independent t-Test of Sex Influence

Gender	n	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Sig.
Male	102	19.43	5.14	198	0.29	.774
Female	98	19.23	4.48			

The result also shows that 5 males have novice competency attainment level, 24 males, 25 females have intermediate competency attainment, while for the proficient competency attainment level, the males are 73 while 69 females are also in this group.

This therefore implies that there is no significant difference in competency attainment of male and female fresh graduates in terms of expectations in survival skills.

Research Question 3

To what extent is the competency attainment of fresh graduates with science background different from those in the social science, technology and vocational studies?

Table 3 reveals that the respondents in the art discipline had 19 proficient competency attainment, science has 19.9 proficiency competency attainment, social science has 18.6 proficiency competency attainment and technology has 18.6 proficiency competency attainment.

Table 3

Survival skills by Discipline

Discipline	Mean	n	SD
Art based	19.00	28	5.43
Science based	19.93	108	4.18
Social Science based	18.57	46	5.24
Technology based	18.61	23	5.77
Total	19.34	200	4.82

This shows that the fresh graduates with science background are significantly more compared to other disciplines in terms of expectations in survival skills. This is because science

has a significant impact on man's view of the world and his role in it. According to Bhadra (2005) science has a certain outlook, operates on certain sets of assumptions, engendering a certain set of attitudes which are often quite different from the traditional outlooks, beliefs and attitudes and hence can have a considerable impact on man's thinking. This explains why the competency attainment of science fresh graduates is higher than the others.

Research Question 4

To what extent is the competency attainment of fresh graduates from one geopolitical zone in Nigeria, different from the others in terms of expectations in survival skills?

This question was answered by carrying out a one-way analysis of variance of the level of survival skill attained by students in each of the six political zones in the country (see Table 4)

Table 4

ANOVA Comparison of Survival skills by University across Geopolitical Zones

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Between Groups	314.545	5	62.909	2.832	.017
within Groups	4310.010	194	22.217		
Total	4624.555	199			

State of Origin in Geopolitical Zone	n	Subset for alpha = .05	
		1	2

North-East	6	13.8333	
South-West	62	18.4516	18.4516
North-West	11	18.8182	18.8182
South-East	67		19.8955
North-Central	18		20.0556
South-South	36		20.5278

As presented on Table 4, comparing the respondents from the geopolitical zones, it was revealed that the competency attainment of the respondents from north east is the least, and this is an indication that the competency attainment of fresh graduates across the geopolitical zones is significantly different.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the researcher concludes that fresh graduates from Nigerian universities have high competency attainment in survival skills in employment. This means that they have high opportunity of obtaining jobs. Furthermore, gender has no effect on the competency attainment level of fresh graduates in terms of survival skills. Therefore, gender is not a barrier to attainment of high survival skills in employment.

Fresh graduates with science background have the highest competency attainment in survival skills, and this explains why science based fresh graduates tend to secure employment faster than their counterparts in other disciplines. It was, therefore, recommended that employers of labour in Nigeria should avoid gender bias in recruitment of fresh graduates as gender is not a barrier in the attainment of high survival skills.

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