

Work Skills Required By Secondary School Graduates for Entry into Cocoyam Production Enterprise in Cross River State, Nigeria

¹David Adie Alawa and ²Okeke, Esther Ijeoma

¹Department of Vocational Education,
University of Calabar, Cross River State

²Department of Agricultural Education,
Federal College of Education Okene, Kogi State

Corresponding Author: David Adie Alawa

Abstract

This study was designed to identify the work skills required by secondary school graduates for entry into cocoyam production enterprise in Cross River State, Nigeria. Four research questions and hypotheses guided the study. The study made use of survey research design. The population for the study was 1,062 respondents comprising 730 Agricultural science teachers in public secondary schools in the state and 332 registered cocoyam farmers with the Cross River Agricultural Development Projects. The Sample for the study was 212 respondents. A 20 percent proportionate sample was used to select the sample through simple random sampling technique. A 38 item questionnaire tagged Work Skills Requirements in Cocoyam Production Enterprise Questionnaire (WSRCPEQ) was the instrument for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts. Split half and Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to determine the stability of the instrument and a coefficient of 0.86 was obtained. Weighted mean scores were used to answer the research questions while Independent t-test statistic was used to test the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance. It was found out that secondary school graduates required work skills training in planning, pre-planting and planting, post planting and post harvesting and marketing operations to successfully enter into cocoyam production enterprise. It was recommended that the work skills areas be used to guide the training of youths and adults on cocoyam production enterprise as well as integrating the skill areas into the skill training programme of the state. The identification work skills in planning, pre-planting and planting, post planting and post harvesting and marketing operations in cocoyam in this study would be beneficial to youths in general and secondary school graduates in particular to become successful entrepreneurs in cocoyam production enterprise in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Keywords: work skills, secondary school graduates, cocoyam production enterprise

INTRODUCTION

Cocoyam (*Xanthosoma spp*; *Colocasia spp*) is an important staple crop that finds use in the households of Nigerians. International Institute for Tropical Agriculture IITA (2007) described cocoyam as a hardy crop that tolerates adverse production conditions such as low fertile soils, drought, insect and disease attack with high yield to guarantee economic returns. The organization gave the average production figure for cocoyam production in Nigeria as 5,068,000 metric tons which accounts for 40 per cent of total world output and explained that the crop can be fried and eaten, boiled and eaten or boiled and pounded into a thick paste similar to that of cassava and yam and eaten with soup. Enete, Amusa and Eze (2009) stated that cocoyam (either white or pink) is a tuber crop where almost all the vegetative parts are used in one form or the other. According to Parkinson (1984) cocoyam is nutritionally superior to cassava and yam as it contains higher protein, minerals, vitamins and a more digestible starch. The hardy nature of cocoyam with inherent high economic value and the various forms to which it can

be consumed by man necessitates its production on a larger scale to tie up the period of scarcity of food supply.

Production is the process of changing or transforming inputs into outputs. In the view of Iwena (2008), production refers to all the activities which results in the creation of goods and services. Production is used in this study to mean the various activities involved in the creation of cocoyam tubers as outputs. Cocoyam production is a curricular content area in agricultural science that is taught to senior secondary school students before graduation, that is, completion of three years senior secondary education. These students who have completed this senior secondary education but are not admitted into higher institution or employed constitute secondary school graduates. These graduates could be engaged in cocoyam production if they are empowered with requisite skills and take advantage of the high economic returns to investment in cocoyam production enterprise.

An enterprise according to Abbott in Ogungbade, Alkali and Ibekwe (2010) is a business operation undertaken by a body which may be one person, a family, a company or cooperative for a particular production or marketing activities. Cocoyam production enterprise involves all the activities that secondary school graduates are engaged in to ensure that cocoyam tubers are produced for consumption and economic purposes. These activities as it concerns every other crop include planning, pre-planting, post-planting and post harvesting operations. All these operations require specific skills for their successful accomplishment.

Skill according to Osinem (2008) is the expertness, practiced ability or proficiency displayed in the performance of a task. The author explained that it is the ability to perform a task acquired through repetition of the operation. In the opinion of Okorie (2000), to possess a skill is the demonstration of acting, thinking or behaving in a specific activity in such a way that the process becomes natural to the individual through repetition or practice. Skill in the context of this study is the ability of secondary school graduates to perform the various operations in cocoyam production with maximum proficiency to ensure the steady supply of its tubers and increase in farm profitability. The acquisition of skills by individuals prepares them for success in the world of work.

Work is conceived by Kuper and Kuper (1996) as any physical and/or mental activities which transform natural materials into a more useful form. The authors explained that work activities are instrumental operations which are undertaken in order to meet certain individual needs either directly or indirectly by providing for the needs of others so that goods and services are received in exchange. Work in this study refers to the various physical and mental activities that must be possessed by secondary school graduates to enhance the production of cocoyam for increased yields and net economic returns. Onuka in Ogungbade *et al* (2010) posited that an individual who works productively is skilled because he has acquired the habit of performing a task in all acceptable manners within his job otherwise called work skills.

Work skills according to Olaitan, Nwachukwu, Igbo and Ekong (1999) are practical activities which an individual performs for work in an enterprise. Work skills therefore are the practical skills that must be possessed by secondary school graduates to perform tasks that could increase yields; generate high economic returns and improve their standard of living through cocoyam production.

In Cross River State, the researcher has observed that secondary school graduates who are mostly youths

who could not further their education lack basic production skills which could help them to succeed in skilled agricultural programmes like cocoyam production enterprise. They rather prefer to travel to the cities and roam the streets in search of white collar jobs that are uncertain. Ogungbade *et al* (2010) observed that the inability for these youths to secure this jobs force them into deviant behaviours such as stealing, fighting, free fraud, commercial sex works among others. However, if skills in cocoyam production are identified, packaged into training programmes and integrated into skills acquisition centres for training unemployed youths, it could help to provide occupational opportunities for interested youths as well as school leavers thereby making them to positively contribute to building the economy of the nation thus, reducing attendant vices posed by idleness.

The researcher's concern over the above observations necessitated this study to identify the works skills required by secondary school graduates for entry into cocoyam production enterprise. Specifically, the study seeks to identify work skills required by secondary school graduates in the areas of planning, pre-planting and planting, post planting, post harvesting and marketing operations in cocoyam production enterprise. Other variables that bear relevance to cocoyam production enterprise such as farmers' attitudes, adoption of farming practices, socio-economic characteristic of farmers with regards to cocoyam production enterprise would not be covered by the study. Furthermore, the study shall cover only Cross River State which is only one out of the six States in South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Cocoyam is widely eaten in Cross River State because of its nutritional contents and general acceptability across the different groups or tribes in the State. However, this important crop is not embraced by secondary school graduates in particular and youths in general in the State as an enterprise in agriculture. It is not certain as why this situation has emerged but one convincing fact is that the engagement of this segment of the population in cocoyam enterprise can shade many negative vices of the youths and make them self reliant. The researcher's concern over this scenario and the consequences of unemployed youths in Cross River State necessitated this study. This is apt as State government programme at the moment is tailored towards youth involvement in productive agriculture. The development of work skills in cocoyam production as focus in this study can evolve content areas for training of secondary school graduates (youths) in youth empowerment and skill acquisition programme of the Cross River State Government.

METHODOLOGY

Four research question and four corresponding hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. Survey research design was adopted for the study. Survey research design according to Ali (2006) is a descriptive study which uses a sample of a definite population of an investigation to document, describe and explain what is existent or the present status of phenomena investigated. The study was carried out in Cross River State. The population for the study was 1,062 respondents comprising 730 Agricultural science teachers in the public secondary schools under the state Secondary Education Board and 332 cocoyam farmers registered with the Cross River State Agricultural Development Projects CRADP.

The sample for the study was 212 respondents made up of 146 agriculture science teachers and 66 cocoyam farmers. A simple random sampling technique (balloting) was used to select 20 percent of the teachers for the study. This choice of 20% agrees with the submission of Uzoagulu (1998) that when a defined population is in a few thousands 20% or more could be used to reduce sampling error. A 38 item questionnaire tagged Work Skills Requirements in Cocoyam Production Enterprise Questionnaire (WSRCPEQ) was the instrument for data collection. The instrument had two sections; A and B. Section A solicited demographic data of the respondents while section B dealt with research variables in the study with the following scale: Very Highly Required – VHR; Highly Required-HR; Moderately Required-MR and Not Required-NR. The highest level in the scale had 4 points and the least received 1point. The instrument was face validated by three experts. Two of the experts were from the Department of Vocational and Special Education (Agricultural Education Unit) while the third validate was from Crop Science Department of the University of Calabar.

Split half technique and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient were used to determine the stability of the instrument and a coefficient of 0.76 was obtained. Two hundred ant two copies of the questionnaire were administered on the respondents with the help of five (5) hired and trained research assistants on a face to face basis and retrieved with a 100 per cent return rate. The data collected was analyzed using weighted mean scores to answer the research questions and independent t-test statistic to test the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance and 210 degree of freedom.

The following decisions guided the interpretation of the results of analysis made:

- a) A cut off point of 2.50 was used for answering the research questions.
- b) For the hypotheses, the null hypotheses was upheld if the calculated t-value was less than critical table value of 1.960 otherwise; the alternate hypotheses was upheld at .05 level of significance.

RESULTS

The results of the study were obtained from the research questions answered and hypotheses tested.

RESEARCH QUESTION 1

What are the work skills required by secondary school graduates in planning for entry into cocoyam production enterprise?

HYPOTHESIS 1

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of teachers of agricultural science and cocoyam farmers on the work skills required by secondary school graduates in planning for entry into cocoyam production enterprise.

The data for answering research question one and hypothesis one are presented in Table 1

Data in table 1 showed that the eleven work skills items recorded mean scores ranging from 2.66 to 3.51. This indicated that their mean were above the cutoff point of 2.50. The observation implies that all work skills items isolated for this section of the study were required by secondary school graduates in planning for entry into cocoyam production enterprises.

Data presented in table 1 also revealed that the eleven work skills items have their calculated t-values ranged from 0.03 to 1.00 which were less than t-table value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and 210 degrees of freedom. This indicated that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of the groups of respondents on the eleven work skills items required by secondary school graduates in planning for entry into cocoyam production enterprise. With this result, the null hypothesis of no significant difference was upheld for the eleven items.

Table 1: Mean ratings and t-test Analysis of the Responses of Teachers of Agriculture Science and Cocoyam Farmers on the work skills required by secondary school graduates in planning for entry into cocoyam production enterprise

SN	Item Statement	N=212					4 t-cal	5 Rmk
		1 RQ \bar{X}	2 Agricultural science teachers \bar{X}_1	SD ₁	3 Cocoyam Farmers \bar{X}_2	SD ₂		
1	Formulate specific objectives for cocoyam production	3.51*	3.48	.60	3.47	.45	0.10	NS
2	Review the objectives periodically according to the forces of demand and supply	3.22*	3.18	.65	3.08	.48	0.28	NS
3	Draw a timetable of activities based on activities involved in cocoyam production	3.33*	3.14	.78	3.00	.42	0.17	NS
4	Choose a farm location	3.10*	3.21	.79	3.03	.52	0.51	NS
5	Take a decision on farm size	3.21*	3.19	.68	2.99	.50	0.57	NS
6	Identify relevant sources of labour	2.84*	2.98	.73	2.86	.57	0.33	NS
7	Identify relevant farm inputs required for cocoyam production enterprise	3.26*	3.20	.60	3.10	.55	1.00	NS
8	Identify sources of funds for the establishment of cocoyam production enterprise	3.08*	3.35	.79	3.13	.51	0.62	NS
9	Identify market outlets for cocoyam enterprise	2.92*	2.60	.63	2.57	.76	0.03	NS
10	Prepare a budget for cocoyam production enterprise	2.66*	2.62	.70	2.56	.56	0.16	NS
11	Keep good records of activities as the unfold in the enterprise	2.97*	2.77	.72	2.59	.61	0.48	NS

Note: Significant @ .05; \bar{X} = Mean; SD= Standard Deviation; RQ= Research Question; t-tab= 1.960; *= Required; NS= Not Significant.

RESEARCH QUESTION 2

What are the work skills required by secondary school graduates in pre-planting and planting operations for entry into cocoyam production enterprise?

HYPOTHESIS 2

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of teachers of agricultural science

and cocoyam farmers on the work skills required by secondary school graduates in pre-planting and planting operations for entry into cocoyam production enterprise.

The data for answering research question two and hypothesis two are presented in table 2

Table 2: Mean ratings and t-test Analysis of the Responses of Teachers of Agriculture Science and Cocoyam Farmers on the work skills required by secondary school graduates in pre-planting and planting operations for entry into cocoyam production enterprise. N=212

SN	Item Statement	N=212					4 t-cal	5 Rmk
		1 RQ \bar{X}	2 Agricultural science teachers \bar{X}_1	SD ₁	3 Cocoyam Farmers \bar{X}_2	SD ₂		
1	Acquire a land for cocoyam production	3.13*	3.08	0.68	3.02	0.54	0.69	NS
2	Clear the acquired plot of land	3.08*	3.00	0.66	2.96	0.62	0.43	NS
3	Rake and burn all debris	2.80*	2.82	0.58	2.76	0.63	0.65	NS
4	Till the land to specifications	3.35*	3.28	0.74	3.12	0.62	1.62	NS
5	Select good quality cormels for planting or cut big corms into sets of about 200g	2.63*	2.72	0.54	2.64	0.51	1.04	NS
6	Mark out the required row spacing 90cm between rows and 90cm within rows	3.40*	3.38	0.81	3.32	0.68	0.60	NS
7	Treat cormels and sets with fungicides before planting	2.87*	2.76	0.63	2.65	0.50	1.36	NS
8	Bury the cormels and sets in the planting distances measured	3.22*	3.38	0.72	3.22	0.69	1.45	NS
9	Cover each stand with soil and mulch material	3.03*	3.00	0.68	2.89	0.71	0.92	NS

Data in Table 2 showed that the nine work skills items recorded mean scores ranging from 2.63 to 3.40. This indicated that their mean were above the cutoff point of 2.50. The observation implies that all work skills items isolated for this section of the study are required by secondary school graduates in pre

planting and planting operations for entry into cocoyam production enterprises.

Data presented in Table 2 also revealed that the nine work skills items have their calculated t-values ranged from 0.43 to 1.45 which were less than t-table value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and 210

degrees of freedom. This indicated that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of the groups of respondents on the nine work skills items required by secondary school graduates in pre-planting and planting operations for entry into cocoyam production enterprise. With this result, the null hypothesis of no significant difference was upheld for the nine items.

RESEARCH QUESTION 3

What are the work skills required by secondary school graduates in post planting operations for entry into cocoyam production enterprise?

HYPOTHESIS 3

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of teachers of agricultural science and cocoyam farmers on the work skills required by secondary school graduates in post planting operations for entry into cocoyam production enterprise.

The data for answering research question three and hypothesis three are presented in Table 3

Table 3: Mean ratings and t-test Analysis of the Responses of Teachers of Agriculture Science and Cocoyam Farmers on the work skills required by secondary school graduates in post planting operations for entry into cocoyam production enterprise. N=212

SN	Item Statement	1		2		3		4	5
		RQ	Agricultural science teachers	Cocoyam Farmers	t-cal	Rmk			
		\bar{X}	\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂			
1	Weed the farm regularly with approved methods	3.40*	3.52	0.88	3.48	0.76	0.30	NS	
2	Apply fertilizer on the soil to recommendation for good growth and yields	3.21*	3.28	0.71	3.18	0.65	0.89	NS	
3	Adopt appropriate methods of pests and diseases control	3.44*	3.50	0.82	3.46	0.77	0.31	NS	
4	Practice appropriate irrigation techniques	3.31*	3.38	0.71	3.27	0.69	0.92	NS	
5	Drain soil water if moisture is in excess	3.08*	3.10	0.84	3.04	0.63	0.60	NS	
6	Maintain farm hygiene till cocoyam harvesting	2.65*	2.70	0.58	2.62	0.66	0.89	NS	
7	Identify mature cocoyam with browning or wilting of leaves	3.00*	3.12	0.65	3.00	0.62	1.33	NS	

Data in Table 3 showed that the seven work skills items recorded mean scores ranging from 2.65 to 3.44 which were above the cutoff point of 2.50. The observation implies that all work skills items isolated for this section of the study were required by secondary school graduates in post planting operations for entry into cocoyam production enterprises.

Data presented in table 3 also revealed that the seven work skills items have their calculated t-values ranged from 0.30 to 1.33 which were less than t-table value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and 210 degrees of freedom. This indicated that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of the groups of respondents on the seven work skills items required by secondary school graduates in post planting operations for entry into cocoyam production enterprise. With this result, the null hypothesis of no significant difference was upheld for the seven items.

RESEARCH QUESTION 4

What are the work skills required by secondary school graduates in post harvesting and marketing operations for entry into cocoyam production enterprise?

HYPOTHESIS 4

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of teachers of agricultural science and cocoyam farmers on the work skills required by secondary school graduates in post harvesting and marketing operations for entry into cocoyam production enterprise. The data for answering research question four and hypothesis four are presented in Table 4

Data in Table 4 showed that the eleven work skills items recorded mean scores ranging from 2.86 to 3.54 and were above the cutoff point of 2.50. The observation implies that all work skills items isolated for this section of the study were required by secondary school graduates in post harvesting and marketing operations for entry into cocoyam production enterprises.

Data presented in Table 4 further revealed that the eleven work skills items have their calculated t-values ranged from 0.40 to 1.57 which were less than t-table value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and 210 degrees of freedom. This indicated that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of the groups of respondents on the seven work skills items required by secondary school graduates in post harvesting and marketing operations for entry into cocoyam production enterprise. With

this result, the null hypothesis of no significant difference was upheld for the eleven items.

Table 4: Mean ratings and t-test Analysis of the Responses of Teachers of Agriculture Science and Cocoyam Farmers on the work skills required by secondary school graduates in post harvesting and marketing operations for entry into cocoyam production enterprise. N=212

SN	Item Statement	1 RQ \bar{X}	2 Agricultural science teachers \bar{X}_1	SD ₁	3 Cocoyam Farmers \bar{X}_2	SD ₂	4 t-cal	5 Rmk
1	Harvest mature corm and cormels with the right farm tools such as cutlass and hoe	3.22*	3.32	0.78	3.26	0.62	0.61	NS
2	Place cormels on a slated platform and cover with leaves	3.01*	2.98	0.72	2.84	0.57	1.56	NS
3	Check the cormels regularly	3.46*	3.52	0.74	3.48	0.66	0.40	NS
4	Sort the corms and cormels into sizes	3.54*	3.62	0.85	3.50	0.63	1.20	NS
5	Determine the prices according to sizes	3.32*	3.22	0.65	3.09	0.51	1.57	NS
6	Advertise the corms and cormels for sale	3.51*	3.48	0.71	3.37	0.55	1.22	NS
7	Transport the produce to the market	3.28*	3.10	0.68	3.02	0.64	0.82	
8	Sale out the produce to buyers based on price tags	2.86*	3.00	0.77	2.88	0.62	1.21	NS
9	Keep accurate sales records	2.99*	3.08	0.75	2.96	0.48	1.40	NS
10	Determine the farm profit and loss	3.22*	3.32	0.83	3.26	0.66	0.55	NS
11	Expand cocoyam enterprise based on farm profit	3.10*	3.05	0.62	3.00	0.58	0.63	NS

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The data generated and analyzed from the research questions and hypotheses from the teachers of agricultural science and registered cocoyam farmers confirmed that all the work skills items are required by secondary school graduates for entry into cocoyam production enterprise. The findings on work skills requirements in planning for entry into cocoyam production enterprise indicated that secondary school graduates should be trained on how to formulate objectives, review the objectives periodically, draw up programme plan, make a budget, identify sources of finance and selection of site among others. The findings agree with Olaitan and Mama (2001) who stated that planning for any enterprise in agriculture is the process of arranging and documenting farm activities before implementation and identified planning activities such as formulation of objectives, revision of the objectives periodically, budgeting, identification of sources of funds and labour among others to be essential to any agricultural production enterprise.

The findings on work skills requirements in pre-planting and planting operations for entry into cocoyam production enterprise indicated that secondary school graduates should be trained to possess skills on how to acquire land for cocoyam production, clear the acquired land, rake and burn the debris, till the land to specification, select good quality corms and cormels for planting, mark out the cocoyam plot among others. The findings agree with Ogungbade *et al* (2010) who carried out a study to determine work skill required by secondary school graduates for entry into groundnut production enterprise in Kaduna state and found out that they

need skills on land acquisition, clearing and raking, tillage, selection of planting materials, marking of the farm plots to specifications among others.

The findings on work skills requirements in post planting operations for entry into cocoyam production enterprise indicated that secondary school graduates should be trained to possess skills on how to weed the farm, apply fertilizer or manure to specifications, adopt appropriate methods of pests and diseases control, practice irrigation and drainage operations among others.

The findings on work skills requirements in post harvesting and marketing operations for entry into cocoyam production enterprise indicated that secondary school graduates should be trained to possess skills on how to store the produce (corms and cormels) to specification, check the produce regularly, sort the produce into sizes, determine the prices of the produce, advertise the produce, transport the produce to the market among others. The findings agree with McCarthy and Perreault (1984) who described marketing as a process which involves buying and selling and identified activities such as identification of buyers, grading, transportation, storage, risk management, records keeping among others to be essential in every enterprise.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The issue of unemployment and employment of skilled work force has been of primary concern to Nigerians and Cross Riverians in particular. This has necessitated studies to determine the work skills requirements of youth for entry into agricultural enterprises. The acquisition of skills by youth in

cocoyam production enterprise could help secondary school graduates who are mostly youths to contribute to the food security question in Nigerian by supplying cocoyam which has a higher nutritive value than the usual yam or cassava. It could also provide employment opportunities for the teaming youths thereby reducing unemployment and its attendant societal vices.

The study therefore identified work skills in the areas of planning, pre-planting and planting, post planting and post harvesting and marketing operation required by secondary school graduates for successful entry into cocoyam production enterprise.

It was therefore recommended that:

1. The agricultural extension officers in the Ministry of Agriculture should use the identified work skills areas by the study to guide the secondary school graduates and members of young farmers club for successful entry into cocoyam production enterprise.
2. The Government of Cross River State through the assistance of curriculum planners should integrate the skills identified by this study into the state skill acquisition training programme for youths and adults in cocoyam production.

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