

NAVIGATING LIFE AFTER GRADUATION AMONG GRADUATES OF FACULTY OF HEALTH SCIENCES, TARABA STATE UNIVERSITY, JALINGO

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Abstract

This paper explores the experiences, challenges, reflections of alumni of the Faculty of Health Sciences of Taraba State University and useful advice is given thereon. The post-graduation experiences vary - struggles in seeking accreditation to professional membership, job market competition, application of academic learning in professional settings, reflections on advice of lecturers, disregard of advice on valuable information, and reflection on choosing alternative course of actions. Using qualitative data obtained through an online survey in which 24 respondents that participated, thematic data analyses was used. The study highlights the significant success of graduate who have effectively applied the university-acquired knowledge and skills in various career paths. For instance, one respondent leveraged on training in epidemiology and biostatistics to analyze health data and inform evidence-based decision-making in public health initiatives. The study recommended that universities and colleges offering health science programs, in collaboration with industries and professional associations should integrate practical skills development.

Key words: Graduates, Success Stories, Challenges, Reflections, Taraba State University, Jalingo

Introduction

Geographically, the largest proportion of youths live in Sub-Saharan Africa and significant segment of this proportion lives in Nigeria (Amare *et al.*, 2021). There is widespread concern about widespread inactivity or underutilization of youths in productive ventures, including maximization of skills acquired in the university in their day-to-day activities. This is particularly important especially now that different economies aim at achieving various targets of sustainable development goals. This underutilization is often attributed to systemic issues, including high unemployment rates, skills mismatches between university training and labor market demands, insufficient entrepreneurial support, and weak policy frameworks to address youth inclusion (ILO, 2020). Furthermore, the prevalence of inactivity among youths undermines efforts to achieve several targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, SDG 8 emphasizes the importance of decent work and economic growth, while SDG 4 focuses on ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2022). Without adequate measures to integrate youth into productive sectors, achieving these goals becomes increasingly challenging.

In addition, studies suggest that youth inactivity exacerbates socio-economic inequalities and poses risks to social stability, as marginalized youth are more likely to engage in negative behaviors such as crime, substance abuse, or violent extremism (World Bank, 2021). On the other hand, effectively harnessing the potential of youth through quality education, targeted skill development, and innovative policies can transform them into catalysts for economic growth and sustainable

development. Addressing these challenges is therefore not only an economic necessity but also a critical strategy for fostering long-term development, reducing poverty, and enhancing social cohesion.

Graduates from health-related disciplines often encounter a range of obstacles such as licensing issues, accreditation delays, and the competitive nature of the job market (Azevedo, 2017 and Abubakar *et al.*, 2022). In Nigeria, these challenges are further worsened by systemic inefficiencies such as bureaucratic bottlenecks in obtaining professional licenses, limited availability of accredited training institutions, and inadequate infrastructure in the health sector (Onwujekwe *et al.*, 2019). The situation is particularly dire for fresh graduates who face a saturated labor market characterized by high unemployment rates and limited entry-level opportunities (NBS, 2022). Additionally, societal expectations, including pressure from family, peers, and the community to achieve financial independence and rapid career success, amplify the stress experienced by graduates (Eboh & Ogueji, 2021).

Despite these challenges, there are notable success stories among Nigerian graduates of health sciences who have leveraged their education, entrepreneurial skills, and resilience to overcome obstacles. For instance, some graduates have excelled in private healthcare practice, research, and public health advocacy, contributing significantly to the improvement of healthcare delivery in Nigeria (Ogundele *et al.*, 2020). Others have pursued further education and gained global recognition, showcasing the potential of Nigerian graduates when provided with the right support and opportunities (Afolabi *et al.*, 2018).

Aim and objectives

The aim of this research is to assess the post-graduation experiences of graduates from the Faculty of Health Sciences, Taraba State University, highlighting their successes, challenges, reflections, and advice for current students and recent graduates. And the specific objectives are as follows:

1. To document success stories of graduates in their career paths, entrepreneurial ventures, or further academic pursuits after graduation.
2. To identify key challenges faced by graduates in their transition from school to the workforce or further studies.
3. To analyze the reflections of graduates on their time at the university and how it prepared them for life after graduation.
4. To gather advice from graduates for current students and new graduates on navigating post-graduation challenges and achieving success

Theoretical Framework: Transition Theory

Transition Theory, developed by Nancy Schlossberg in 1981, serves as an appropriate framework for understanding the post-graduation experiences of graduates. This theory focuses on how individuals adapt to significant life changes and the factors that influence successful transitions. It provides valuable insights into the successes, challenges, and coping strategies employed by graduates as they move from academic environments to professional or further academic pursuits.

At the core of Transition Theory is the concept of a **transition**, which refers to any event or non-event that results in a change in roles, routines, relationships, or assumptions. For graduates, the transition from university to post-graduation life represents a major shift, encompassing the challenges of entering the workforce, pursuing entrepreneurial ventures, or furthering education. The theory emphasizes that the nature of this transition whether anticipated, unanticipated, or non-occurring shapes how individuals experience and respond to it.

A central component of the theory is the **4 S's model**, which identifies four key factors influencing how individuals manage transitions: **Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies**.

1. **'Situation'** refers to the circumstances surrounding the transition, including its timing, the extent to which it is perceived as positive or negative, and the resources available to navigate it. For health sciences graduates, situational factors may include licensing delays, the competitive job market, or socio-economic pressures.
2. **'Self'** involves the personal attributes and psychological resources of the individual, such as resilience, confidence, and skills. Graduates' ability to leverage their university education and personal determination plays a critical role in overcoming barriers and achieving success.
3. **'Support'** highlights the role of external assistance, including mentorship, family, peer networks, and institutional guidance. Strong support systems often enable graduates to navigate challenges more effectively, whether in securing employment, starting businesses, or pursuing further studies.
4. **'Strategies'** are the coping mechanisms and actions individuals take to manage the demands of a transition. These may include acquiring additional skills, engaging in internships, networking, or seeking professional advice. Strategies not only help graduates manage immediate challenges but also equip them for long-term success.

Transition Theory is highly relevant to this study as it aligns with the four objectives. First, the framework aids in analyzing success stories by emphasizing how individuals use resources and strategies to achieve career and academic goals. Second, it provides a lens to examine the challenges faced by graduates, highlighting situational and personal barriers that hinder smooth transitions. Third, the theory shows the importance of preparedness, offering insights into how graduates perceive their university education in light of their post-graduation realities. Finally, Transition Theory reinforces the value of advice from experienced individuals, emphasizing the role of proactive strategies and support systems in navigating life changes.

Research Methodology

Study Design

This study employs an online survey methodology in collecting qualitative data from alumni of the Faculty of Health Sciences, Taraba State University. The survey explored these post-graduation experiences, challenges, reflections of the respondents and offer advice as they navigate through their professional lives after completing their studies.

Study Participants

Participants in this study were alumni of Taraba State University, Jalingo that graduated from the Faculty of Health Sciences. A total of 24 respondents voluntarily participated in the survey. The selection of participants was based on availability and willingness to provide detailed responses to open-ended questions related to their post-graduation experiences.

Data Collection

For convenience and reachability, an online survey platform was used for the data collection. The survey consists of open-ended qualitative questions which was designed in eliciting in-depth responses from the participants. The questions were structured to cover key aspects of the experiences and events of the responses. These include:

- **Experience since graduation:** Participants were asked to describe their overall experiences after graduation - highlighting successes and any significant milestones.
- **Encountered challenges or unexpected situations:** Respondents were prompted to narrate specific challenges or unexpected difficult situations they faced after graduation, providing detailed accounts as much as possible.
- **Application of learning:** Alumni were asked to explain how they have applied the knowledge and skills acquired during their studies to their post-graduation moments.
- **Reflections on teacher's advice:** Participants were asked to reflect on advice received from their lecturers in the university. They were asked to specify the pieces of advice that made significant impact to their post-graduation moments.
- **Disregarded advice:** Respondents were asked about any advice they initially disregarded but later found to be valuable, sharing their personal insights and experiences.
- **Advice to current students:** Participants were asked to offer advice to current students, based on their own post-graduation experiences and lessons learned.
- **Regrets and alternative actions:** Alumni were given opportunities to reflect on the things they wish they had known or done differently during their university days.
- **Focus areas for students:** Finally, respondents were asked to recommend specific skills or knowledge areas that current students should focus on to enhance their preparedness for life after graduation.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data obtained from the survey responses were analyzed thematically (Peel, 2020) and the results were presented on a table.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were adhered to throughout the study. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their voluntary participation, and confidentiality of their responses. No identifiable information was collected to ensure anonymity and privacy.

Result Presentations

This study assesses the post-graduation journey of alumni from the Faculty of Health Sciences at Taraba State University, Jalingo focusing on their experiences, challenges encountered, reflections, and the advice they offer to current students. The research utilized qualitative data obtained through an online survey involving 24 respondents, who provided detailed insights into their professional lives after graduating from the university. The findings are structured and presented across eight tables, each addressing specific research questions. These questions explore various areas of the alumni's experiences, such as their transition into the professional world, challenges faced, applications of academic learning in practical settings, reflections on advice received from their lecturers, insights into initially disregarded but valuable advice, recommendations for current students, regrets or lessons learned from their academic journey, and focus areas suggested for current students to enhance their employability and career readiness. The study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the alumni's perspectives, offering valuable insights for educational institutions and students alike in preparing for life after graduation in the health sciences discipline.

Question 1: What has been your experience since graduation? Give us all the story you can

- 🌟 "Life after graduation is not only exhausting but very demanding as well. It comes with responsibility, pressure, independence and depression/anxiety in some cases. It is scary out here especially when there are lots of people having this expectation of you to become financially supportive...the bread winner." (Anonymous).
 - 🌟 "Life has been a little hectic but thank God for being alive. As a graduate of Medical Laboratory Science, 2022, is almost a year now, I am staying at home without my certificate and license to practice. Since then, I have been encountering several challenges from family members, relatives and friends, until I became exhausted of explanations on why I am still at home like a non- graduate after passing through five good years in the university." (Anonymous).
 - 🌟 "It has not been easy for me knowing fully well that I finished without license. The challenge of accreditation has been frustrating and very challenging." (Anonymous).
 - 🌟 "life is full of opportunities and one has to be conscious of the fact that you have to prepare for it or else, you end up stranded in the waves of life. I have learned to remain responsible and take care of the future because, I have a name and future to protect." (Anonymous).
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Question 2: Have you encountered any challenges or unexpected situations? if yes, give us the detail story

- ✚ "Yes! The challenge remains the issue of accreditation, opportunities keep coming but the demand for license has always been the challenge." (Anonymous).
 - ✚ "I have faced various challenges and unexpected situations; one memorable challenge was during a fieldwork project in a rural community where access to healthcare was limited. Despite careful planning, we encountered logistical issues such as transportation shortages and difficulty in coordinating with local authorities." (Anonymous).
 - ✚ "Challenges are part of every mankind, I encountered so many challenges but let me give only one for now; I was to travel with World Health Organisation team to Senegal for data collection and management exercise, but I was disqualified because of not having license of practice. I really felt so bad (Anonymous).
 - ✚ "When I relocated from Bauchi to Gombe State, my NYSC PPA place told me they don't have accommodation, no stipends to support me and nothing, I felt so depressed." (Anonymous).
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Question 3: How have you applied what you learned during your studies to your post-graduation life?

- ✚ "I have applied what I learned in several ways in my post-graduation life. Firstly, I have utilized my knowledge of epidemiology and biostatistics to analyze health data and inform evidence-based decision-making in various public health initiatives." (Anonymous).
 - ✚ "Working as a technical MEL assistance and a facility support assistant in my organization gave me the opportunity to practice all I learnt in public health" (Anonymous).
 - ✚ "Leadership skills I learned in while in the university, have opened doors for me to for networking." (Anonymous).
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Question 4: Reflecting on the advice given by your lecturers during your time as a student, which pieces of advice have proven to be true or valuable

- ✚ "The best advice I received through my university period, was the one from my able lecturer Sct. Jolly Ahmadu, who told us that, we should not depend on our academic career but rather learn skills in addition to our academic career for us to be more successful in life." (Anonymous).
 - ✚ "I could remember how Dr. Babylon Philemon encouraged collaborative problem-solving approaches, where team members work together to identify challenges, brainstorm solutions, and implement strategies collectively. Teamwork can promote creativity, ownership, and shared responsibility within teams, leading to more effective and sustainable outcomes." (Anonymous).
 - ✚ "My lecturers will always tell me, you need to learn at least one skill to be able to face the present world and maintain relevance. For example, data analysis and project management." (Anonymous).
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Question 5: Were there any pieces of advice that you initially disregarded but later found to be valuable? If yes, give us the detail story

- 🌟 "One piece of advice that I initially disregarded but later found to be valuable was the importance of taking breaks and prioritizing self-care. During my studies, I was often immersed in coursework, research projects, and extracurricular activities, and I tended to prioritize productivity over personal well-being... This experience taught me the importance of listening to advice, even if it initially seems counterintuitive, and being open to reassessing my beliefs and behaviors based on new insights and experiences." (Anonymous).
 - 🌟 "That we shouldn't procrastinate whatever we are doing but I thought it was a joke until when I kept on procrastinating and one day, I could not meet up with the demands and was humiliated and lost some money that I will have gotten instead." (Anonymous).
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Question 6: If you could offer advice to current students who are yet to graduate, what would it be?

- 🌟 "Embrace learning Opportunities: Take advantage of every opportunity to learn and grow, both inside and outside the classroom. Explore diverse subjects, engage in extracurricular activities, and seek out internships or volunteer opportunities to gain practical experience in your field of interest." (Anonymous).
 - 🌟 "Build Strong Relationships: Cultivate meaningful relationships with peers, lecturers, mentors, and professionals in your field. These connections can provide support, guidance, and valuable networking opportunities throughout your academic and professional journey." (Anonymous).
 - 🌟 "Prioritize Self-Care: Take care of your physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Make time for activities that recharge and rejuvenate you, such as exercise, hobbies, and spending time with loved ones. Remember that self-care is essential for maintaining resilience and achieving long-term success." (Anonymous).
 - 🌟 "Think beyond your profession and acquire skills that will give you a competitive edge and bring out the best in you." (Anonymous).
 - 🌟 "learn at least one skill before you leave school tomorrow because this world is changing in trends and only those with the right skills will benefit from it." (Anonymous).
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Question 7: Based on your current experience, what do you wish you had known or done differently while still in school?

- ✚ "I wish to have engaged more in Public Health Research and to participate in Public Conferences." (Anonymous).
 - ✚ "I wish I had known how competitive the labor market is, that would have helped me to put more effort into my academics and also learn a digital skill." (Anonymous).
 - ✚ "Reflecting on my own experience, there are things I wish I had known or done differently while still in school... While I was involved in various activities during school, I wish I had explored a broader range of opportunities, both within and outside my field of study." (Anonymous).
 - ✚ "I wished I had learned data analysis, monitoring and evaluation, project management while still in school because it has a lot of opportunities out there though I am presently working on them." (Anonymous).
 - ✚ "I wish I had prioritized self-care sooner... It took me some time to realize the importance of taking breaks, managing stress effectively, and prioritizing my well-being alongside my academic and extracurricular commitments." (Anonymous).
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Question 8: Are there any specific skills or knowledge areas you would advise students to focus on? if yes, explain

- ✚ "Entrepreneurship and computer knowledge are very important." (Anonymous).
 - ✚ "Students should learn other skills or trades that can help generate money for them, not only what they studied." (Anonymous).
 - ✚ "Areas of epidemiology and fieldwork should be taken very seriously." (Anonymous).
 - ✚ "Communication Skills: Strong communication skills, both verbal and written, are essential... Students should focus on improving their ability to articulate thoughts clearly and concisely." (Anonymous).
 - ✚ "Data Analysis and Interpretation: Proficiency in data analysis and interpretation is highly valuable... Students should develop skills in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data to inform decision-making." (Anonymous).
 - ✚ "Digital literacy: Familiarize themselves with various digital tools, platforms, and software relevant to their field of study." (Anonymous).
 - ✚ "Interdisciplinary Knowledge: Having a broad understanding of various disciplines and their intersections can be advantageous. Students should seek opportunities to explore diverse subjects." (Anonymous).
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Discussion of findings

The study highlights the significant success of graduates who have effectively applied the university-acquired knowledge and skills in various career paths. For instance, one respondent leveraged on training in epidemiology and biostatistics to analyze health data and inform evidence-based decision-making in public health initiatives. This demonstrates the value of specialized knowledge and analytical skills in addressing real-world health challenges and advancing public health objectives. Another respondent showcased leadership and public health competencies as a technical Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) assistant, illustrating how practical knowledge, combined with strong leadership abilities, can serve as a catalyst for career growth and professional excellence. These success stories showcase the resilience and adaptability of graduates navigating a competitive labor market. It also emphasizes the critical role of a well-rounded education that blends theoretical learning with practical experience. According to Ogundele *et al.* (2020), integrating applied learning opportunities, such as internships, case studies, and fieldwork, into university curricula enhances graduates' readiness for the workforce and equips them with the tools needed to excel in their professions. Furthermore, Afolabi *et al.* (2018) added that universities that prioritize skills development and foster entrepreneurial thinking produce graduates who are not only employable but also capable of creating innovative solutions to societal problems.

The study also revealed that transition from university to post-graduation life is often marked by systemic and personal challenges that hinder smooth integration into the workforce or further studies. A notable barrier for many graduates is the delay in obtaining accreditation and licensing, which restricts their ability to practice professionally or capitalize on career opportunities, including international engagements. For example, some respondents shared frustration over missed opportunities, such as being disqualified from international assignments due to the absence of professional licenses. This aligns with findings by Adebayo and Yusuf (2021), who highlighted that delayed certification processes in Nigeria's higher education system are a significant obstacle to graduate employability and professional development. More so, socio-economic pressures can further worsen these challenges. Graduates often face heightened expectations to become financially supportive of their families, a responsibility that amplifies the stress of unemployment or underemployment. Such pressures are not unique but are deeply rooted in the cultural fabric of many African societies, where graduates are viewed as primary contributors to family welfare (Akinwale, 2020). This socio-cultural expectation can lead to emotional challenges, including anxiety, depression, and feelings of stagnation. One respondent described the stress of repeated explanations to family and friends about inability to receive certification due to non-accreditation, this is related with the report of Ede *et al.* (2019), who identified societal expectations as a key stressor for Nigerian graduates.

The study additionally revealed Graduates reflections on their time at the university, emphasizing both the strengths and gaps in their education. Positive reflections include the value of leadership training and exposure to teamwork, which graduates found useful for navigating professional environments. However, some respondents regretted not engaging in broader learning opportunities, such as acquiring data analysis, project management, and digital skills, which are crucial in the

current labor market. These reflections suggest a need for universities to emphasize interdisciplinary learning and equip students with versatile, market-relevant skills that prepare them for an evolving job market. These reflections mirror observations by Obasi *et al.* (2018), who found that the lack of practical and interdisciplinary learning opportunities in Nigerian universities often leaves graduates underprepared for dynamic and competitive work environments. The feedback obtained in this study also shows the necessity of incorporating interdisciplinary and practical skillsets into university curricula. Ogunleye *et al.* 2021 reported that programs that integrate technology, data-driven decision-making, and project management alongside core academic content can better equip students for diverse career paths.

Furthermore, the study documented a wealth of advice for current students and new graduates, offering insights by the participants on their experiences navigating the post-graduation life. A recurring recommendation was the importance of engaging in learning opportunities beyond the classroom. Internships, volunteering, and extracurricular activities were identified as avenues to gain practical experience and exposure to real-world challenges. These recommendations align with findings by Eze *et al.* (2019), who emphasized that experiential learning complements academic training and enhances graduate employability.

Another significant theme was the need to acquire additional, market-relevant skills. Graduates highlighted the value of competencies such as data analysis, communication, and entrepreneurship, which foster adaptability and competitiveness in an ever-evolving job market. This aligns with the work of Adebajo and Omole (2021), who noted that equipping students with interdisciplinary skills is critical for success in today's dynamic professional environment. Graduates further identified the importance of digital literacy and entrepreneurial thinking, advocating for skill sets that extend beyond traditional academic disciplines. Building strong networks was another piece of advice mentioned. Graduates noted that relationships with mentors, peers, and professionals could provide crucial guidance, support, and opportunities. As highlighted by Akintola and Afolabi (2020), robust professional networks are a vital resource for navigating career transitions and accessing mentorship, which can significantly influence career trajectories. Lastly, the emphasis on self-care and stress management reflected an awareness of the mental health challenges associated with post-graduation life. Graduates advised prioritizing activities that foster well-being and resilience, this is related with the findings of Akinyele and Olatunji (2018), who advocated for integrating mental health education into university programs to better prepare students for life's pressures.

Conclusion

This study explored the experiences, success stories, challenges, reflections, and advice of graduates from the Faculty of Health Sciences at Taraba State University, Jalingo as they navigated life after graduation. The study highlights the significant success of graduate who have effectively applied the university-acquired knowledge and skills in various career paths such as using the training in received in epidemiology and biostatistics to analyze health data and inform evidence-based decision-making in public health initiatives. Also, the findings highlight the challenges faced by these graduates,

particularly regarding accreditation issues, job market competitiveness, and the importance of acquiring additional skills beyond academic qualifications. Reflective insights highlighted the value of mentorship, self-care, and interdisciplinary knowledge in enhancing resilience and navigating professional uncertainties. The advice provided by respondents emphasizes the need for proactive learning, skill diversification, and strategic networking to thrive in post-graduation life. Ultimately, these insights contribute to a deeper understanding of the transitional phases and preparedness of graduates from health science disciplines in Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. Universities should establish robust alumni networks and platforms to document and showcase the success stories of graduates. These platforms can facilitate knowledge sharing and serve as motivation for current students. Additionally, incorporating success stories into career services and orientation programs could inspire students to maximize their academic and extracurricular opportunities.
2. It is essential for universities to collaborate with regulatory bodies and professional associations to streamline accreditation and licensing processes for graduates in health-related disciplines. This could include establishing clear communication channels about the requirements and timelines for obtaining licenses and certifications.
3. Universities should consider revising their curricula to incorporate more interdisciplinary courses that focus on practical, market-relevant skills, such as data analysis, project management, and digital literacy. Graduates' reflections emphasize the importance of acquiring skills beyond the academic scope, which could be achieved by encouraging internships, collaborative projects, and extracurricular activities. Additionally, offering more workshops, seminars, and access to professional development opportunities during the academic period would better prepare students for the challenges they will face in the workforce or further academic studies.
4. To support current students and new graduates in navigating post-graduation challenges, universities should establish mentorship programs that connect students with alumni and professionals in their field. Graduates can provide valuable advice on career development, personal resilience, and how to manage the transition to the workforce.

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