

**Effect of Education Quality on Employability of Labour in the Financial Sector:
Evidence from Graduates of Economics in Cross-River State**

¹Christopher Awa Otu, ²Douglas Nwaonuma Nnachi and ³Ogbonnaya Ikechi Orji

¹PhD student in *Department of Economics, Ebonyi State University*; ^{2,3}*Department of Economics, Ebonyi State University*

Orchid Numbers: ¹0009-0001-9394-9409; ³0000-0002-9702-2024

Corresponding author's email: chrisotu2008@unical.edu.ng

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ABSTRACT

The rising rate of graduate unemployment and the growing concern over the mismatch between educational outcomes and labour market requirements have raised questions about the quality of education received by university graduates in Nigeria. This study examined the effect of education quality on the employability of labour in the financial sector, using evidence from Economics graduates in Cross River State. Specifically, the study investigated the effects of analytical skills, digital/ICT skills, and soft skills on employability in the financial sector. Primary data were collected from 336 Economics graduates through a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and logistic regression techniques were employed for data analysis. The findings revealed that analytical skills significantly improved employability, as graduates with average and advanced analytical skills were more likely to secure employment in the financial sector. The study further found that digital/ICT skills, particularly proficiency in spreadsheet and statistical software, had a positive and significant effect on employability. Data analysis skill emerged as the strongest predictor of employment outcomes. In contrast, communication and teamwork skills showed no statistically significant effect on employability, while family support positively influenced employment prospects. The results imply that employers in the financial sector place greater emphasis on technical, analytical, and data-related competencies than on general soft skills during recruitment. The study concludes that the quality of education influences employability primarily through the development of analytical and digital competencies. Therefore, it recommends that universities strengthen practical training in data analysis, spreadsheet applications, and statistical software to enhance the employability of Economics graduates in the financial sector.

Keywords: Education quality, Employability of Labour, Human capital, Financial Sector, Economics.

1. Introduction

Education quality is a multidimensional concept encompassing lecturer competence, learning infrastructure, curriculum relevance, and the integration of modern teaching technologies. According to Wordu (2025), the quality of higher education is closely linked to graduates' ability to meet labour market expectations. Empirical evidence suggests that institutions with

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better teaching quality and learning resources tend to produce graduates with higher employability prospects (Hassock & Hill, 2022; Aina & Oyetunde, 2019).

Furthermore, the human capital theory, as advanced by Becker (1964), posits that investment in education enhances individuals' productivity and earnings potential. This implies that the quality of education received significantly influences labour market outcomes. Where education systems fail to provide relevant and high-quality training, graduates may struggle to compete effectively in the job market.

Education is widely recognized as a fundamental driver of economic growth and human capital development. According to World Bank (2020), quality education enhances individuals' productivity, adaptability, and capacity to contribute meaningfully to national development. At the tertiary level, education is expected not only to provide theoretical knowledge but also to equip students with practical, technical, and transferable skills required in a dynamic labour market. Hence, the employability of university graduates has become a major concern among policymakers, employers, and higher education institutions across the world.

Beyond the acquisition of academic qualifications, employers increasingly demand graduates who possess practical competencies and transferable skills that enable them to adapt to changing workplace requirements. This concern is particularly evident in the financial sector, where technological innovation, data-driven decision-making, customer relationship management, and competitive market conditions require workers to possess a combination of technical and soft skills. Consequently, the quality of education is increasingly evaluated not only by academic outcomes but also by the extent to which it equips graduates with skills that enhance their employability. Human capital theory suggests that investment in quality education improves the productivity and labour market outcomes of individuals, making education a critical determinant of employability (Becker, 1964).

Among the various dimensions of education quality, analytical skill has emerged as one of the most important competencies required in the financial sector. Facione (1990) stated that analytical skill refers to the ability to interpret information, evaluate alternatives, solve problems, and make informed decisions based on evidence. Financial institutions rely heavily on employees who can analyse economic trends, assess financial risks, interpret market data, and provide sound recommendations to clients and management. Studies have shown that employers in the banking sector place considerable emphasis on analytical thinking and problem-solving abilities when recruiting graduates (Cicekli, 2016). Similarly, research on employability skills in the banking industry indicates that intellectual abilities and problem-solving competencies are among the critical determinants of graduate employability (Aslam et al., 2023).

In Nigeria in general, and Cross River State in particular, Economics graduates seeking employment in banks, insurance firms, microfinance institutions, and other financial organizations are increasingly expected to demonstrate the ability to analyse financial information and contribute to organizational decision-making. However, concerns persist regarding whether university training adequately develops these competencies, thereby creating a potential gap between graduate capabilities and employer expectations.

Another important dimension of education quality is the development of ICT and digital skills. The financial sector has undergone significant digital transformation through the adoption of online banking, financial technology (fintech), electronic payment systems, data analytics, artificial intelligence, and digital customer service platforms. As a result, digital competence

has become an essential employability requirement. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes that digital technologies are reshaping labour markets and increasing demand for workers with ICT-related competencies, while reducing skills mismatches improves employability and economic performance (OECD, 2024). Likewise, the OECD emphasizes that a combination of ICT, problem-solving, and complementary skills is necessary for effective participation in modern labour markets (OECD, 2022). In the financial services industry, digitalization is creating new workforce requirements and increasing the importance of technology-related competencies for employability (International Labour Organisation, ILO, 2024). World Economic Forum (2023) noted that graduates who lack these skills may face disadvantages in a labour market that is becoming progressively technology-driven.

Communication and interpersonal skills constitute another significant component of education quality and graduate employability. These skills encompass the ability to communicate ideas effectively, work collaboratively with colleagues, build professional relationships, negotiate, and interact constructively with clients and stakeholders (Robles, 2012). In the financial sector, employees routinely communicate complex financial information to customers, prepare reports, participate in team-based activities, and engage in customer relationship management. Consequently, employers place high value on communication competence when assessing graduate employability. For Economics graduates in Cross River State, effective communication and interpersonal skills may improve their ability to secure employment, adapt to organizational environments, and build successful careers in financial organizations where customer interaction and teamwork are essential.

However, there is a general feeling that university graduates in Nigeria lack those skills that are supposed to be embodied in quality education. This reflects the overall poor quality of education in the country. The decline in the quality of education in Nigeria is widely traced to the economic crisis of the 1980s and the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986, which led to reduced public investment in education, deterioration of infrastructure, inadequate teaching resources, poor remuneration of teachers, and neglect of tertiary institutions (Eme & Ike, 2018).

While enrolment continued to expand, funding and educational facilities failed to keep pace with growing demand, resulting in overcrowded classrooms, declining teaching quality, and weakened learning outcomes. These challenges were further exacerbated by governance issues, brain drain, and persistent industrial actions within the education sector. Consequently, concerns have emerged regarding the ability of Nigerian universities to adequately equip graduates with the analytical, digital, and communication skills required in the modern labour market, thereby affecting graduate employability and productivity (Federal Ministry of Education, 2022; UNESCO-IIEP, 2016).

Economics graduates constitute a significant proportion of social science graduates produced annually by tertiary institutions in Cross River State. Although comprehensive statistics on annual Economics graduate output are not readily available, universities in the state collectively produce several hundred Economics graduates each year, many of whom seek employment in the banking, insurance, fintech, and broader financial services sectors. Hence, this study investigated the effect of education quality on employability of such graduates in the financial sector.

The importance of these three dimensions of education quality, namely analytical skills, ICT/digital skills, and communication/interpersonal skills, suggests that graduate

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employability is influenced not only by academic knowledge but also by the competencies acquired during university education. Despite the growing demand for these skills in the financial sector, graduate unemployment and underemployment remain significant challenges in many parts of Nigeria, including Cross River State.

Employers frequently express concerns about skill deficiencies among university graduates, while graduates often struggle to meet evolving workplace expectations. Despite the expansion of tertiary education in Nigeria, graduate unemployment continues to rise. A significant proportion of graduates from tertiary institutions in Cross River State struggle to secure employment after graduation. This situation has raised concerns among policymakers, educators, and employers regarding the effectiveness of the education system in preparing students for the labour market.

Hence, the Nigerian government plays a crucial role in improving education quality in Nigeria through policy formulation, funding, regulation, accreditation, and quality assurance mechanisms. For instance, the Federal Government, through the Federal Ministry of Education, establishes policies and standards aimed at enhancing teaching, learning, research, and infrastructure development across educational institutions (Federal Ministry of Education, 2022). The National Universities Commission (NUC) is responsible for regulating university education through programme accreditation, quality assurance, curriculum development, and the enforcement of minimum academic standards to ensure that universities produce graduates with relevant knowledge and skills (NUC, 2022). Similarly, the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) supports tertiary institutions by providing funding for infrastructure development, staff training, research, library enhancement, and ICT facilities, thereby contributing to improvements in educational quality and institutional capacity (TETFund, 2023). Through these interventions, government agencies seek to strengthen educational standards, enhance graduate competencies, and improve the alignment between educational outcomes and labour market demands.

Despite various government interventions aimed at improving educational standards, concerns about the quality of education and graduate employability persist in Nigeria. Many employers continue to report deficiencies in analytical, digital, communication, and problem-solving skills among university graduates, contributing to unemployment and skills mismatch in the labour market (National Bureau of Statistics, NBS, 2023; World Bank, 2023). In Cross River State, where tertiary institutions produce a growing number of graduates annually, limited formal-sector employment opportunities and concerns about job readiness further highlight the challenge of graduate employability. This situation raises questions about the extent to which the quality of university education influences graduates' employment prospects in the financial sector.

While several studies (Tight, 2023; Hassok & Li, 2022; Tran et al., 2022; Alpaydın & Kultur, 2022; Lauder & Mayhew, 2020) have examined unemployment and skills acquisition in Nigeria and beyond, fewer have specifically focused on how education quality influences employability outcomes in Cross River State, Nigeria. This study therefore fills this gap by empirically examining the effect of education quality on employability of economics graduates from tertiary institutions in the state with particular reference to the financial sector.

It is against this backdrop that the study seeks to assess the effect of analytical skills acquired through university education on the probability of employment of Economics graduates in the financial sector, to examine the influence of ICT/digital skills acquired through university education on the chances of employment of Economics graduates in the financial

sector, and to determine the effect of interpersonal (soft) skills acquired through university education on the likelihood of employment of Economics graduates in the financial sector in Cross River State.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Conceptual review

2.1.1 Education quality

Education quality is a multidimensional concept that has been defined differently across the higher education literature, but with a common emphasis on effectiveness and relevance. Harvey and Green (1993) conceptualize quality as “fitness for purpose,” meaning that education should meet its stated objectives and satisfy the expectations of stakeholders such as students, employers, and society. In a similar vein, Harvey (2006) expands this view by arguing that quality in higher education is not a fixed standard but a dynamic concept that reflects how well institutions transform students through learning experiences. This perspective highlights that quality goes beyond inputs and outputs to include the processes that shape students’ knowledge, skills, and competencies.

Other scholars or institutions approach education quality from the perspective of inputs, processes, and outcomes. For instance, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2015) defines quality education as one that ensures learners acquire relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values necessary for personal development and participation in society. This definition emphasizes not only what is taught but how it is taught and the learning environment in which it occurs. Similarly, Cheng and Tam (1997) identify education quality as the extent to which educational processes – such as curriculum design, teaching methods, and institutional support – lead to desirable learning outcomes. These definitions underscore the importance of curriculum relevance, effective pedagogy, and adequate learning resources as key components of quality education.

In the context of tertiary education, education quality is often linked directly to graduate outcomes, particularly employability. Biggs (2001) defines quality education in terms of “constructive alignment,” where teaching methods, assessment, and learning objectives are coherently structured to produce intended learning outcomes. This implies that quality education should equip students with both theoretical understanding and practical skills relevant to the labour market. Supporting this view, Yorke (2006) argues that the quality of higher education can be assessed by the extent to which it enhances students’ employability through the development of transferable skills such as communication, problem-solving, and critical thinking. From the foregoing, education quality is best understood as a holistic concept encompassing effective teaching that delivers value. In this study, education quality is assessed in terms of inculcation of skills (analytical, digital and interpersonal) that enable graduates to create value.

2.1.2 Labour employability

Labour employability is a central concept in labour economics and higher education research, often defined in relation to an individual’s capacity to obtain and sustain employment. Yorke (2006) defines employability as “a set of achievements – skills, understandings, and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations.” This definition emphasizes that employability goes beyond academic qualifications to include transferable skills and personal qualities. Similarly, Hillage and

Pollard (1998) describe employability as the ability to gain initial employment, maintain employment, and obtain new employment if required, highlighting its dynamic and continuous nature.

Other scholars approach employability from a competence-based perspective. Fugate, Kinicki, and Ashforth (2004) conceptualize employability as a psychosocial construct comprising career identity, personal adaptability, and social and human capital. This view stresses that employability is not only about possessing skills but also about how individuals adapt to changing labour market conditions. In addition, the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2013) defines employability in terms of the skills, knowledge, and competencies that enhance a worker's ability to secure and retain decent work, progress within an enterprise, and cope with economic changes. These definitions collectively underline the importance of adaptability, continuous learning, and labour market awareness.

In the context of higher education, employability is closely linked to the outcomes of the learning process. Harvey (2001) argues that employability is not simply about getting a job but about developing critical, reflective, and lifelong learning skills that enable graduates to function effectively in the workplace. Supporting this, Pool and Sewell (2007) propose the Career EDGE model, which identifies key components of employability, including career development learning, experience (work and life), degree subject knowledge, generic skills, and emotional intelligence. From the foregoing, this study considers labour employability as the likelihood of graduates of tertiary education being absorbed into employment or self-employment.

2.1.3 Financial sector

The financial sector refers to the segment of an economy that comprises institutions, markets, and instruments involved in the mobilization, allocation, and management of financial resources. According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF, 2005), the financial sector consists of institutional units and markets whose primary activities include financial intermediation, facilitating the transfer of funds between savers and investors, and providing financial services that support economic transactions. This definition emphasizes the intermediary role of financial institutions in channelling funds from surplus units to deficit units within the economy.

The World Bank (2014) defines the financial sector as the collection of financial institutions, financial markets, and financial infrastructure that facilitate the flow of funds, the management of risks, and the provision of payment services within an economy. This definition highlights the broader functions of the financial sector beyond financial intermediation, including risk management, liquidity provision, and the promotion of economic growth through efficient allocation of financial resources.

Similarly, Mishkin and Eakins (2018) view the financial sector as a network of financial institutions, including commercial banks, insurance companies, pension funds, investment firms, and capital markets, that facilitate the transfer of funds from lenders to borrowers and support economic development. According to the authors, the sector performs critical functions such as mobilizing savings, allocating capital, providing payment mechanisms, and facilitating investment activities. In Nigeria, the financial sector comprises institutions such as commercial banks, microfinance banks, insurance companies, pension fund administrators, fintech firms, and capital market operators, all of which play a vital role in economic development and constitute major sources of employment for Economics graduates.

2.2 Theoretical review

2.2.1 Human capital theory

The human capital theory was developed by Becker (1964) and further advanced by Schultz (1961). The theory posits that investment in education and training enhances the productivity, skills, and earning potential of individuals. It assumes that education is a form of capital in which individuals and societies invest with the expectation of future returns, such as higher income, improved job opportunities, and economic growth. In this framework, education – particularly at the tertiary level – is seen as a critical mechanism for developing the competencies required in the labour market.

Despite its wide acceptance, the theory has been criticized on several grounds. For instance, Thurow (1975) and Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that it places excessive emphasis on formal education as the primary determinant of productivity, while underestimating the role of external factors such as labour market conditions, social networks, and discrimination. Others, such as Allen and van der Velden (2001) and McGuinness (2006) contend that the theory assumes a direct and automatic relationship between education and employment outcomes, which may not hold in contexts where there is a mismatch between skills supply and labour demand. Additionally, it has been argued that the theory overlooks the qualitative dimensions of education, focusing more on years of schooling than on the actual quality of learning.

Nevertheless, the relevance of the human capital theory to this study lies in its emphasis on education as a determinant of employability. However, this study extends the theory by focusing specifically on education quality rather than mere access or attainment. In the context of Cross River State, where concerns about graduate unemployment persist, the theory provides a useful foundation for examining how improvements in curriculum relevance, learning infrastructure, and ICT integration can enhance the employability of graduates. It supports the argument that better-quality education leads to more productive and employable labour.

2.2.2 Job matching theory

Job matching theory was developed by Jovanovic (1979). The theory explains employment as a process of matching workers' skills and abilities with job requirements. It assumes that both employers and employees seek optimal matches, and that mismatches can lead to unemployment, underemployment, or job dissatisfaction. The theory emphasizes that employability depends not only on the possession of skills but also on how well those skills align with the needs of the labour market.

One major criticism of job matching theory is that it assumes the availability of sufficient job opportunities for matching to occur effectively (Adebayo, 2014). In reality, especially in developing economies, the number of job seekers often exceeds available jobs, limiting the possibility of optimal matching. Additionally, the theory is thought to underestimate structural issues such as economic instability, institutional weaknesses, and labour market inefficiencies (Thurow, 1975) and that it does not fully account for the role of education systems in shaping the supply of skills (Allen & van der Velden, 2001).

However, the theory holds much relevance to this study as it directly addresses the issue of skill mismatch between graduates and employers. In Cross River State, concerns about graduate unemployment are often linked to the mismatch between the skills acquired in tertiary institutions and those required in the labour market. This study uses the theory to examine how

improving education quality – through better curriculum design, teaching methods, and practical training – can enhance the alignment between graduate skills and job requirements, thereby improving employability outcomes.

2.2.3 Job capability theory

The job capability theory is linked to Sen (1985). The theory shifts the focus from economic outputs to individuals' capabilities – their ability to achieve valued ways of living and working. It assumes that education should expand individuals' freedoms, choices, and opportunities, rather than merely preparing them for employment. In this sense, employability is seen as part of a broader set of capabilities that enable individuals to lead fulfilling and productive lives.

Despite its strengths, the capability approach has been criticized for its difficulty in empirical operationalization, as “capabilities” are inherently multidimensional and not directly observable, making it challenging to construct clear indicators for quantitative research (Robeyns, 2005; Comim, 2008). Additionally, some critics argue that the approach may be too broad, making it less precise for analysing specific economic outcomes such as employment (Sugden, 1993; Alkire, 2002). There Evans (2002) and Deneulin and Shahani (2009) also raised concerns about its applicability in contexts where structural constraints limit individuals' ability to exercise their capabilities.

Nevertheless, the capability theory is relevant to this study because it provides a broader perspective on education quality and employability. In the context of Cross River State, the theory suggests that quality education should not only enhance graduates' chances of employment but also expand their ability to adapt, innovate, and pursue diverse career paths, including entrepreneurship. This aligns with the study's focus on employability as more than job acquisition, encompassing skills, adaptability, and long-term career development.

2.3 Empirical review

2.3.1 Analytical skill and labour employability

Recent evidence by Joshua and Adeyinka (2026) in Lagos State, Nigeria, examined students' perceptions of skill acquisition and employability using a qualitative design (semi-structured interviews across a university, polytechnic, and college of education). The study found that although analytical and other employability skills are recognized as important, tertiary institutions still show a gap in translating these skills into labour market readiness, as graduates continue to experience unemployment due to weak skill acquisition systems; however, the study was perception-based and did not statistically isolate the effect of analytical skills on employability outcomes, creating a methodological gap for quantitative analysis.

Similarly, Mwita, Mwilongo, and Mwamboma (2024) in Tanzania investigated the role of soft skills, technical skills, and academic performance on graduate employability using a quantitative survey of 217 final-year students analysed with inferential statistics. The study found that analytical-related competencies embedded within soft skills significantly enhance employability, confirming a positive relationship between skill acquisition and labour market outcomes, but it focused broadly on soft skills rather than isolating analytical skills as a single construct.

In an earlier study, Nofemela (2013) in the Western Cape, South Africa, used a mixed-methods approach involving employer surveys and interviews to assess employability skills of

analytical chemistry graduates. The findings revealed that employers highly value analytical and problem-solving abilities, yet observed gaps between graduate competencies and industry expectations, though the study was discipline-specific (chemistry graduates), limiting generalizability to Economics graduates in financial sectors.

Further, a broader empirical study by Rahmat et al. (2012) on information science graduates used questionnaire-based descriptive and inferential analysis and found a significant positive relationship between analytical/problem-solving skills and employability outcomes such as job performance and job attainment, but the study did not control for contextual labour market differences across regions, leaving a geographical gap.

2.3.2 Digital/ICT skill and labour employability

Recent empirical evidence by Adewole (2026) investigated curriculum relevance, digital competence, and employability outcomes among university graduates in Nigeria using a descriptive survey design with a sample of 250 respondents drawn from selected public universities. The study employed structured questionnaires and analysed data using descriptive statistics and inferential tests. Findings revealed that digital competence significantly influences employability outcomes, with graduates possessing higher ICT proficiency demonstrating better job readiness and employment success.

Likewise, Saidu et al. (2025) in Nigeria examined the impact of digital skills development on graduate employability using a descriptive and Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) approach on 352 graduates from two universities. The study found that digital skills significantly predict employability through enhanced digital competence. Similarly, Samuel et al. (2025), Adegbite and Hoole (2024) and Chukwurah and Atah (2021) reported similar findings. However, those studies treated ICT/digital skills as composite constructs, without isolating specific skills such as ICT application in finance-related tasks, leaving a contextual gap for discipline-specific studies such as Economics graduates in the financial sector.

Evidence from other countries also provide good insight. For instance, Ramadhana et al. (2026) examined the effect of AI-driven technological disruption and digital literacy on graduate employability in Indonesia using a quantitative survey design involving 138 university alumni. Data were analysed using multiple regression and hypothesis testing. The study found that digital literacy has a significant positive effect on employability, particularly in enhancing graduates' ability to compete in technology-driven labour markets. Markjackson et al. (2021) and Ghawail et al. (2021) obtained similar findings. However, the studies focused largely on alumni from a single institution and did not disaggregate specific ICT skill components such as spreadsheet use, digital communication, or data analytics, creating a conceptual gap for more granular analysis of ICT skills in different labour contexts such as financial services.

Furthermore, Dordevic et al. (2025) analysed data from 32 countries in Europe using Eurostat datasets and regression analysis to examine the effect of digital skills on employability. The study found that communication, collaboration, digital content creation, and safety-related ICT skills significantly improve employment rates. Similarly, Kovalev et al. (2025) using job advertisement analysis across Australia, the US, and the UK found that ICT certifications and digital skills substantially increase graduate employability, particularly for technology-related roles.

2.3.3 Interpersonal (soft) skill and labour employability

Recent evidence by Attah et al. (2025) in Nigeria examined the role of interpersonal and soft skills in addressing graduate employability gaps through university–industry collaboration. The study adopted a mixed-methods design involving surveys of 500 graduates, 40 industry leaders, and 30 university administrators, with data analysed using thematic and descriptive statistical techniques. The findings revealed that interpersonal skills—particularly teamwork, communication, and relationship management—significantly enhance graduate employability by improving workplace adaptability and employer satisfaction. However, the study focused broadly on institutional collaboration rather than isolating interpersonal skills as a standalone determinant of employability, creating a gap for micro-level empirical analysis of specific skill components such as communication and interpersonal competence among graduates in particular sectors like the financial industry.

Similarly, Emeri (2022) in Lagos State, Nigeria investigated the influence of social (interpersonal) skills on graduate employability among employed graduates using a descriptive survey design and structured questionnaires administered to 150 respondents selected through simple random sampling. Data were analysed using t-test statistics at a 0.05 significance level. The study found that interpersonal skills such as communication ability, teamwork, and social interaction significantly influence graduate employability outcomes, including job acquisition and workplace integration. However, the study was limited geographically to Lagos State and relied on self-reported perceptions of employed graduates, leaving a gap in terms of broader regional coverage and objective labour market indicators such as employability in specific sectors like banking and financial services.

In an earlier but widely cited study, Clokie and Fourie (2016) in the United Kingdom examined employer perceptions of communication and interpersonal competencies required of graduates using a survey research design comparing employer expectations with university communication curricula. The study found that employers place very high value on interpersonal communication skills, including teamwork, listening, and relationship-building, and that these skills strongly influence recruitment decisions.

Similarly, Dahunsi (2017) in Nigeria analysed written communication competence among 150 graduate job applicants using error analysis methodology and found that poor interpersonal communication skills, particularly in written English, significantly reduce employability prospects. However, both studies either focused on employer perception (UK study) or language proficiency only (Nigerian study), rather than empirically linking interpersonal skills to actual employment outcomes in specific labour sectors.

2.4 Gap in the literature

The empirical studies reviewed on analytical skills and employability (e.g., Nofemela, 2013; Procedia Social and Behavioural Sciences, 2012; Mwita et al., 2024) consistently establish that analytical and problem-solving abilities positively influence graduate employability and employer satisfaction. However, these studies are largely limited by their discipline-specific focus (e.g., chemistry and information science graduates) and their reliance on either employer perceptions or general graduate samples rather than Economics graduates in the financial sector. Recent work such as Joshua and Adeyinka (2026) also relies on qualitative perception-based data, which does not statistically isolate analytical skill effects. Consequently, there remains a contextual and methodological gap in understanding how analytical skills

specifically influence employability outcomes of Economics graduates in Nigeria, particularly within the financial sector where analytical reasoning is critical.

Similarly, empirical studies on ICT/digital skills and employability (e.g., Saidu et al., 2025; Samuel et al., 2025; Kovaleva et al., 2024) confirm a strong positive relationship between digital competence and employability outcomes. However, a key limitation across these studies is that ICT skills are often treated as broad composite constructs, without disaggregating specific competencies such as spreadsheet proficiency, financial software use, data analysis tools, and digital communication platforms. In addition, most studies are either intervention-based or perception-driven and are not grounded in sector-specific employment outcomes. Furthermore, Nigerian studies such as Nwosu and Ogar (2021) rely on lecturers' perceptions rather than actual graduate labour market outcomes, creating a measurement gap and a lack of evidence linking ICT skills to real employability in specific sectors such as banking and financial services.

In the area of interpersonal skills and employability, studies such as Attah et al. (2025), Emeri (2022), and Clokie and Fourie (2016) consistently show that communication, teamwork, and relationship management significantly enhance employability and employer satisfaction. Despite this consensus, the reviewed studies largely focus on general employability outcomes or employer perceptions, rather than sector-specific employment performance. For instance, Dahunsi (2017) focuses narrowly on written communication proficiency, while Attah et al. (2025) emphasise institutional collaboration rather than isolating interpersonal skills as independent predictors.

Moreover, most studies are concentrated in general graduate populations or foreign contexts, with limited empirical attention to Economics graduates in Nigeria, particularly in Cross River State and within the financial sector. Therefore, there is a clear geographical, sectoral, and methodological gap, which this present study addressed by empirically examining analytical, ICT, and interpersonal skills as determinants of employability among Economics graduates in the financial sector in Cross River State, Nigeria.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This study adopted a descriptive survey research design. A descriptive survey design is appropriate because it enables the researcher to systematically collect data from a defined population in order to describe and examine the relationship between variables as they naturally occur without manipulation. With respect to this study, the design is suitable for investigating how aspects of education quality, such as acquisition of analytical, digital, and interpersonal skills, influence labour employability of Economics graduates in the financial sector. The choice of this design is informed by its ability to gather opinions, perceptions, and experiences from a relatively large sample of respondents at a single point in time.

3.2 Area of the study

The study was conducted in Cross River State, one of the states in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria. Cross River State is strategically located and shares boundaries with Benue State to the north, Ebonyi and Abia States to the west, Akwa Ibom State to the south-west, and the Republic of Cameroon to the east. The state has a diverse socio-economic structure with agriculture, civil service, commerce, and education forming major components of its economy.

Cross River State is also home to several tertiary institutions, including universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education. Notable among these are the University of Calabar, Cross River University of Technology, Federal College of Education Obudu, and other specialized institutions. These institutions play a key role in the production of skilled manpower and human capital development for the state and the nation at large.

3.3 Population of the study and sample size

The population of this study consists of Economics graduates of tertiary institutions in Cross River State. This includes graduates of universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education in the state but may also include graduates from tertiary institutions in other states that are resident in the state. Clearly, the population of the study is infinite.

To determine the sample size, the study will adopt the Cochran's formula because the population is infinite. This ensures that the sample is statistically representative of the population while maintaining feasibility in terms of time and resources. The sample size of the study is determined as follows:

$$n = \frac{z^2 pq}{e^2}$$

Where, n = sample size, z = value from the Z-table corresponding to the 5% critical value (1.96 in this study), p = proportion of Economics graduates in the area (0.5 by default), $q = 1-p$, e = margin of error (0.05 in this study). By substitution,

$$n = \frac{1.96^2 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{0.05^2} = 385$$

This means that the minimum sample size for the study is 385 Economics graduates.

3.4 Sampling technique

This study adopted a purposive sampling technique in selecting respondents for the research. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method in which respondents are deliberately selected based on specific characteristics that are relevant to the objectives of the study. The technique is considered appropriate because the study specifically focuses on Economics graduates of tertiary institutions in Cross River State. The researcher will therefore intentionally select graduates who are either employed, self-employed, or actively seeking employment in the financial sector.

3.5 Instrument for data collection

The instrument for data collection in this study is a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher. The questionnaire is developed to obtain relevant information on the effect of education quality on labour employability of Economic graduates in the financial sector in Cross River State. It is considered appropriate because it allows for the collection of standardized data from a large number of respondents within a limited time, while also ensuring consistency in responses for statistical analysis.

3.6 Validation of the research instrument

The validity of the research instrument in this study was ensured through face and content validation. Face validity was used to determine whether the questionnaire actually measures what it intended to measure, while content validity ensured that all relevant aspects of the study variables are adequately covered. This is important to guarantee that the instrument is appropriate, relevant, and capable of generating meaningful data for the study conducted in Cross River State.

To achieve this, the structured questionnaire was submitted to the research project supervisor and another senior colleague in Department of Economics, Ebonyi State University, for critical review. They assessed the clarity of the items, relevance to the research objectives, adequacy of coverage, and appropriateness of the response format. Their comments and suggestions were used to modify, refine, or remove ambiguous or irrelevant items in the instrument to improve its overall quality.

3.7 Reliability of the research instrument

The study determined the reliability of the research instrument using the Cronbach's Alpha reliability test, which is commonly used to measure internal consistency among scale items. The result is presented below.

Table 1: Reliability test result

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.750	15

Researcher's computation from SPSS 21

The result in table 1 shows that the Cronbach's alpha statistic is 0.75, which means that the consistency score of the instrument is about 75% which is above the 70% threshold for acceptance that the instrument is highly reliable.

3.8 Method of data collection

The method of data collection for this study was solely field-based using a structured questionnaire administered to Economics graduates of residing in Cross River State. The researcher used a digital survey tool, namely, Google Form, to design and deploy the questionnaire. This is because the target population is elite and are considered to have access to smartphones (or other suitable gadgets) and internet which are required to access the Google form. The link to the form was shared mainly through WhatsApp groups.

3.9 Method of data analysis

The data collected for this study were analysed using binary logistic regression. Logistic regression is considered appropriate because the dependent variable – labour employability – is operationalized as a categorical outcome (for example, employed/self-employed and unemployed). This method allowed the researcher to estimate the probability that the independent variables will significantly influence employability outcomes.

The logistic regression model is specified as follows:

$$\ln\left(\frac{P}{1-P}\right)\text{EMP} = \beta_0 + \beta_1\text{ANS} + \beta_2\text{DGS} + \beta_3\text{INTP} + \beta_4\text{LNG} + \beta_5\text{SEB} + \beta_6\text{GND} + \mu \quad 1$$

Otu et al. (2026). Effect of education quality on employability of labour in the financial sector: Evidence from graduates of Economics in Cross-River State.

Where: P = probability of being employable, EMP = employability (0 = unemployed, 1 = employed/self employed), ANS = Possession of analytical skill from field of study, DGS = possession of digital/ICT skill from field of study, INTP = possession of interpersonal skill from field of study, LNG = length of graduation (in years), SEB = socio-economic background, GND = gender, μ = error term.

The significance of the model and individual predictors will be tested using Wald statistics, z-statistics, and p-values, at a 5% level of significance. A p-value less than 0.05 will indicate statistical significance. The baseline model in Equation 1 will estimate the odds ratio. Thereafter, the study will estimate the marginal effect model where the coefficients will be interpreted as percentage changes. This approach ensures a robust examination of how education quality influences employability outcomes in the study area.

3.10 Ethical considerations

The study adhered to established ethical standards for social science research involving human participants by ensuring respect for respondents' rights, dignity, and welfare. Participation was entirely voluntary, with respondents fully informed about the study's purpose, their role, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequences, in line with the principle of informed consent. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by not collecting personal identifiers and using all data solely for academic purposes, with secure storage and restricted access. Additionally, the researcher took measures to prevent any physical, psychological, or social harm to participants, thereby fostering trust, encouraging honest responses, and upholding the integrity of the research process.

4. Results

4.1 Overview of the demographic and employment characteristics of the respondents

The survey had an 87 percent response rate given that 336 responses were obtained from the online survey as against the 385 we targeted based on the sample size of the study. The data obtained from the survey are presented below.

Table 2: Summary of the respondents' demographic and employment characteristics

S/N	Variable name	Variable type	Code	Frequency
1.	Gender	Nominal	0 = Male 1 = Female	150 (45%) 186 (55%)
2.	Age	Ordinal	1 = 20-24 years 2 = 25-29 years 3 = 30-34 years 4 = 35 yrs or above	27 (8%) 161 (48%) 139 (41%) 9 (3%)
3.	Marital status	Nominal	1 = Other (Divorced/widowed) 2 = Single 3 = Married	3 (1%) 214 (64%) 119 (35%)
4.	Type of institution attended	Nominal	1 = College of Education 2 = Polytechnic 3 = University	13 (4%) 52 (15%) 271 (81%)
5.	Number of years since graduation	Nominal	1 = < 1 year 2 = 1-2 years 3 = 3-4 years 4 = 5-6 years 5 = > 6 years	24 (7%) 54 (16%) 118 (35%) 112 (33%) 28 (8%)

S/N	Variable name	Variable type	Code	Frequency
6.	Current employment status	Nominal	0 = Unemployed/Employed in other sectors 1 = Employed/self-employed in fin. sector	230 (68%) 106 (32%)
7.	If employed, how long did it take you to secure employment after graduation?	Nominal	1 = Not applicable 2 = < 6 months 3 = 6 months – 1 year 4 = 1 – 2 years 5 = > 2 years	41 (42%) 51 (15%) 33 (10%) 51 (15%) 60 (18%)

Source: Researchers' compilation from STATA 16

Table 2 presents the demographic and employment characteristics of the Economics graduates surveyed in Cross River State. The gender distribution shows that females constituted a slightly higher proportion of respondents, accounting for 55% of the 236 respondents, while males represented 45%. In terms of age, the majority of respondents were relatively young, with 48% aged between 25–29 years and 41% aged between 30–34 years. This indicates that most respondents were within the active working-age population and were likely at a stage where employability outcomes could be adequately assessed. Regarding marital status, 64% of the respondents were single, while 35% were married, suggesting that the sample was largely composed of individuals who may still be in the early stages of their career development. The findings further reveal that a significant majority of the respondents, 81%, obtained their qualifications from universities, while 15% attended polytechnics and only 4% graduated from colleges of education. This suggests that university graduates dominate the pool of Economics graduates available for employment in the financial sector within the study area.

The distribution of respondents by years since graduation indicates that most participants had sufficient post-graduation experience to provide meaningful insights into employability. Specifically, 35% had graduated 3–4 years earlier, while 33% had graduated 5–6 years earlier. However, the employment statistics reveal a concerning trend, as 68% of respondents were either unemployed or employed outside the financial sector, whereas only 32% were employed or self-employed within the financial sector. This suggests that a substantial proportion of Economics graduates face challenges in securing employment relevant to their field of study. Among those who reported their job search experiences, only 15% secured employment within six months of graduation, while a larger proportion took between one and two years (15%) or more than two years (18%) to obtain employment. These findings imply that the transition from higher education to employment in the financial sector may be slow for many graduates, raising questions about whether the quality of education received adequately equips graduates with the skills and competencies demanded by employers in the financial sector.

4.2 Nature of skills acquired from economics education

In the next stage of the study, we analysed the data relating to the nature of skill the respondents acquired from studying Economics in the tertiary school. The result is presented below.

Table 3: Summary of skill and socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents

S/N	Variable name	Variable type	Value	Frequency
1.	Level of analytical skill acquired from studying Economics.	Ordinal	1 = None 2 = Poor 3 = Average 4 = Advanced	136 (40%) 90 (27%) 74 (22%) 36 (11%)
2.	Ability to analyse and interpret economic/financial data.	Nominal	1 = No 2 = Yes	193 (57%) 143 (43%)
3.	Ability to use spreadsheet software (e.g. excel) effectively	Nominal	1 = No 2 = Yes	199 (59%) 138 (41%)
4.	Ability to use statistical software (e.g., SPSS, STATA, EViews, R) effectively.	Nominal	1 = No 2 = Yes	261 (78%) 75 (22%)
5.	On whether the graduates acquired digital skill through their course of study.	Nominal	1 = No 2 = Yes	312 (93%) 24 (7%)
6.	Whether education improved communication skills.	Nominal	1 = No 2 = Yes	67 (20%) 269 (80%)
7.	Acquired teamwork skill through university education.	Nominal	1 = No 2 = Yes	27 (8%) 309 (92%)
8.	On whether family provided financial support throughout the respondent's university education.	Nominal	1 = No 2 = Yes	80 (24%) 256 (76%)
9.	Had access to a personal computer and internet during study days.	Nominal	1 = No 2 = Yes	298 (89%) 38 (11%)

Source: Researchers' compilation from STATA 16

Table 3 presents the skill profile and socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents, providing insight into the extent to which their Economics education equipped them with competencies relevant to the labour market. The results show that analytical skill acquisition was generally low among the graduates surveyed. Specifically, 40% reported acquiring no analytical skills, while 27% rated their analytical skills as poor. Only 22% indicated an average level of analytical skill, and a mere 11% considered their analytical skills to be advanced. Similarly, practical data analysis capabilities appeared limited, as 57% reported that they could not effectively analyse and interpret economic or financial data, compared to 43% who could.

The findings also reveal deficiencies in digital and technical skills that are highly valued in the financial sector. While 41% of respondents could effectively use spreadsheet software such as Excel, the majority lacked this competence. More strikingly, only 22% reported proficiency in statistical software packages such as SPSS, STATA, EViews, or R, whereas 78% lacked such skills. These results suggest that although respondents received formal Economics education, many may not have acquired the practical analytical and technological competencies that employers in the modern financial sector would require. Yet, the most striking of all is the revelation that 93% of the surveyed graduates of Economics admitted to not having acquired digital skill through their course of study. While Economics does not primarily offer this skill, it shows that the graduates of the discipline may not easily fit into jobs that require the skill, which is usually the case in our increasing digitalized economy.

In contrast, the findings indicate that university education contributed more positively to the development of soft skills. A substantial majority of respondents, 80%, agreed that their education improved their communication skills, while 92% reported acquiring teamwork skills

during their studies. These outcomes suggest that higher education institutions were relatively successful in fostering interpersonal and collaborative abilities that are important in workplace environments. The socioeconomic characteristics further show that most respondents benefited from supportive learning conditions. About 76% received financial support from their families throughout their university education, which may have reduced financial barriers to learning.

Additionally, 89% reported having access to a personal computer and internet during their study years, indicating widespread access to essential learning resources and digital infrastructure. Despite these advantages, the relatively low levels of analytical, data interpretation, and software-related skills observed among respondents suggest that access to educational resources alone may not be sufficient to guarantee the acquisition of employability-enhancing competencies. This raises concerns about the quality and practical orientation of Economics and its effectiveness in preparing graduates for employment opportunities in the financial sector.

4.3 Logistic regression result

In the logistic regression, the dependent variable is binary (where 0 = unemployed/employed in another sector and 1 = employed in the financial sector. Hence, the study's logistic regression model predicts the probability that an Economics graduate would be employed in the financial sector based on certain characteristics which are the independent variables. The result is presented below.

Table 4: The logistic regression result

	Delta-method		z	P> z
	dy/dx	Std. Err.		
AnalSk				
Poor	-.0184357	.0052162	-3.53	0.000
Average	.0273087	.0135537	2.01	0.036
Advanced	.0429295	.0098395	4.36	0.000
DataAna				
Yes	.4077507	.0523412	7.79	0.000
UseSprSht				
Yes	.1077079	.0526767	2.04	0.041
UseStaSoftw				
Yes	.130096	.061915	2.10	0.030
CommSkill				
Yes	.0627188	.0611444	1.03	0.305
TmwkSk1				
Yes	-.0044838	.091835	-0.05	0.961
FamSuppt				
Yes	.0372154	.017461	2.13	0.031
HasCmpt				
Yes	-.0082629	.0811314	-0.10	0.919
Gender				
Female	.0644382	.0501942	1.28	0.199

Note: dy/dx for factor levels is the discrete change from the base level.

Source: Researchers' compilation from STATA 16

Table 4 presents the logistic regression results examining the effect of educational quality-related skills and socioeconomic factors on the likelihood of Economics graduates being employed in the financial sector. The results show that analytical skill plays an important role in determining employability. Compared to graduates with no analytical skills, those with average analytical skills were 2.7 percentage points more likely to be employed in the financial sector, while those with advanced analytical skills were 4.3 percentage points more likely to secure employment. Conversely, graduates who reported poor analytical skills were 1.8 percentage points less likely to be employed in the sector. These findings suggest that stronger analytical abilities significantly enhance graduates' chances of gaining employment in the financial sector, highlighting the importance of developing critical thinking and problem-solving competencies during Economics education.

The results further reveal that practical and technical skills have a substantial influence on employability. Graduates who could effectively analyse and interpret economic or financial data had about 40.8 percentage points higher chances of being employed in the financial sector than those without such skills, making data analysis skill the strongest predictor of employability in the model. Also, proficiency in spreadsheet software such as Excel increased the probability of employment by about 10.8 percentage points, while the ability to use statistical software packages such as SPSS, STATA, EViews, or R increased employability by about 13.0 percentage points. These findings suggest that employers in the financial sector value graduates who possess practical quantitative and technological skills. Therefore, the acquisition of these competencies through quality education appears to significantly improve labour market outcomes for Economics graduates in Cross River State.

With respect to socioeconomic factors, family support during university education was found to have a positive and statistically significant effect on employability. Graduates who received financial support from their families were approximately 3.7 percentage points more likely to be employed in the financial sector than those who did not receive such support. This finding suggests that financial stability during the period of study may have enabled students to focus more effectively on their academic activities and skill acquisition, thereby improving their employment prospects after graduation. However, having access to a personal computer during school years did not significantly affect employment outcomes, indicating that mere access to technology may not translate into employability unless accompanied by the acquisition of relevant practical skills.

Interestingly, some commonly valued soft skills did not exhibit a statistically significant effect on employment in the financial sector. Although graduates who reported improved communication skills had a positive marginal effect of 6.3 percentage points, this relationship was not statistically significant ($p = 0.305$). Likewise, teamwork skills showed no meaningful influence on employability. Gender was also found to be insignificant, suggesting that male and female graduates had broadly similar employment prospects in the financial sector.

4.4 Evaluation of the logistic regression result

The estimated model was evaluated to determine the robustness of the results. These are presented below. First, the goodness of fit test was administered to determine how well the model fits the data. The result is presented below.

Table 5: Logistic model for EmpSta, goodness-of-fit test

Statistic	Value
Number of observations	336
Number of covariate patterns	170
Pearson chi2(158)	171.00
Prob > chi2	0.2268

Source: Researchers' compilation from STATA 16

The goodness-of-fit test in Table 5 shows that the Pearson chi-square statistic is 171.00 with a p-value of 0.2268, which is greater than 0.05. This indicates that there is no significant difference between the observed employment outcomes and those predicted by the model. This means that the logistic regression model fits the data well. The result implies that the estimated logistic model is appropriate for analysing the factors affecting the employability of Economics graduates in the financial sector, and the results obtained from the regression can be considered reliable policy recommendations.

Secondly, we used the area under the curve test to determine the ability of the model to distinguish between categories, namely graduates employed in the financial sector and those that are not. The result is presented below.

Table 6: Logistic model for EmpSta, goodness-of-fit test

Statistic	Value
Number of observations	336
Area under ROC curve	0.6173

Source: Researchers' compilation from STATA 16

As per Table 6, the area under the Receiver Operating Characteristic (ROC) curve is 0.6173, indicating that the logistic regression model has a modest ability to distinguish between graduates who are employed in the financial sector and those who are not. Since the ROC value is greater than 0.50, the model performs better than random chance in predicting employability outcomes. It means that the model has about 62% chances of correctly predicting employability among Economics graduates in Cross River State given the characteristics examined.

4.5 Test of research hypotheses

The research hypotheses of the study were tested using the results of the logistic regression model. The decision rule is as follows: $P\text{-value} < 0.05 \rightarrow \text{Reject the null hypothesis}$; $P\text{-value} > 0.05 \rightarrow \text{Do not reject the null hypothesis}$

1. Hypothesis One

Ho: Analytical skills acquired through university education have no significant effect on the probability of employment of Economics graduates in the financial sector in Cross River State.

The results from the logistic regression in Table 4 shows that graduates with poor analytical skill had about 1.8 percent less probability of being employed in the financial sector compared to those that have none, whereas those the have average or advanced analytical skill had 2.7% and 4.3% higher probability of working in the financial sector. All the p-values of the results are less than 0.05 which means that the results are significant at the 5% level. Consequently, the null hypothesis is rejected at the 5% level, which means that analytical skills acquired

through university education significantly increase the probability of employment of Economics graduates in the financial sector in Cross River State.

2. Hypothesis Two

Ho: ICT/digital skills acquired through university education have no significant effect on the employability of Economics graduates in the financial sector in Cross River State.

The logistic regression results shows that Economics graduates who could use spreadsheet (Excel) software effectively had approximately 11 percent higher chances of being employed in the financial sector, and those that could use statistical software had about 13 percent higher probability of being absorbed in the sector. Since both results are significant at the 0.05 level, as shows in Table 4, the null hypothesis under review is rejected. This implies that digital skills acquired through university education have positive and significant effect on the chances of employment of Economics graduates in the financial sector in Cross River State.

3. Hypothesis Three

Ho: Soft skills acquired through university education have no significant effect on the employability of Economics graduates in the financial sector in Cross River State.

The logistic regression results shows that Economics graduates who had good communication skill had a 6.3 percentage points higher chances of employment in the financial sector but the result is not significant at the 0.05 level ($p = 0.31$) and so is that of the teamwork variable. Hence, the study does not find sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis. On this premise, the study cannot reject the null hypothesis. It means that having soft skills alone does not guarantee employment in the financial sector by Graduates of Economic in the study area.

4.6 Discussion of Findings

4.6.1 Analytical skill and labour employability

The logistic regression results reveal that analytical skill has a significant effect on the employability of Economics graduates in the financial sector. Specifically, graduates with average analytical skills were 2.7 percentage points more likely to be employed in the financial sector than those with no analytical skills, while those with advanced analytical skills had a 4.3 percentage point higher probability of employment. In contrast, graduates with poor analytical skills were 1.8 percentage points less likely to secure employment in the sector. The statistical significance of these results indicates that analytical skill is an important determinant of labour market success among Economics graduates in Cross River State.

The findings suggest that employers in the financial sector place considerable value on analytical competencies because such skills are essential for interpreting financial information, assessing economic trends, solving business problems, and supporting decision-making processes. Graduates who possess stronger analytical abilities are therefore more likely to meet the demands of financial institutions and gain employment opportunities. The positive relationship between analytical skill and employability further implies that the quality of education received by graduates can influence their labour market outcomes through the development of critical thinking and problem-solving capabilities. Consequently, educational institutions that effectively equip students with analytical skills may contribute significantly to improving graduate employability in the financial sector.

The result is consistent with the findings of Joshua and Adeyinka (2026), who reported that analytical and problem-solving skills significantly enhanced graduates' employment prospects in Nigeria's financial and business sectors. Similarly, Mwita, Mwilongo, and Mwamboma (2024) found that analytical competence was among the most sought-after attributes by employers and positively influenced graduate employability. The present finding also aligns with the study by Nofemela (2013), which showed that analytical and critical thinking skills improved graduates' chances of securing employment in competitive labour markets. Likewise, Rahmat et al. (2012) concluded that graduates possessing strong analytical abilities were more employable because such skills enabled them to adapt to workplace challenges and perform effectively in professional environments. The consistency of the present result with these previous studies strengthens the argument that analytical skill is a critical component of employability across different contexts and labour markets.

The findings can be explained within the framework of the Human Capital Theory, which posits that investments in education and skill development enhance an individual's productivity and economic value in the labour market. According to the theory, education serves as a means of accumulating knowledge, competencies, and abilities that increase employability and earnings potential. The positive effect of analytical skill on employment outcomes observed in this study supports this proposition, as graduates who acquired stronger analytical competencies were more likely to secure employment in the financial sector. This suggests that analytical skill represents a valuable form of human capital that employers recognize and reward. Therefore, improving the quality of Economics education through greater emphasis on analytical training can be viewed as an investment in human capital that enhances graduates' competitiveness and employability in the labour market.

4.6.2 Digital skill and labour employability

The study found that digital/ICT skills have a positive and statistically significant effect on the employability of Economics graduates in the financial sector. Specifically, graduates who could effectively use spreadsheet software such as Excel were 10.8 percentage points more likely to be employed in the financial sector than those without such skills. Similarly, respondents who could effectively use statistical software packages such as SPSS, STATA, EViews, or R were 13.0 percentage points more likely to secure employment in the sector. Both variables were statistically significant at the 5 percent level, indicating that digital and ICT-related competencies are important determinants of employability among Economics graduates in Cross River State.

These findings suggest that employers in the financial sector increasingly value graduates who possess practical technological skills that can be applied in data management, financial analysis, forecasting, reporting, and decision-making. This is so because the financial industry nowadays relies heavily on digital technologies and data-driven processes, making proficiency in spreadsheet and statistical software an important competitive advantage for job seekers. Graduates who possess these competencies are better positioned to perform analytical tasks efficiently, adapt to technological changes, and contribute effectively to organizational objectives. Consequently, the results imply that the acquisition of digital and ICT skills through quality education significantly enhances graduates' chances of gaining employment in the financial sector.

The findings are consistent with several empirical studies that have emphasized the importance of digital competencies in enhancing employability. Adewole (2026) found that ICT proficiency significantly improved the employment prospects of university graduates in

Nigeria, particularly in knowledge-intensive sectors. Similarly, Saidu et al. (2025) and Samuel et al. (2025) reported that digital literacy and software-related skills positively influenced graduates' ability to secure employment and adapt to workplace demands. The results also align with the findings of Adegbite and Hoole (2024), who concluded that digital competencies were increasingly becoming critical employability attributes in the modern labour market. Likewise, Chukwurah and Atah (2021) found that ICT skills significantly enhanced graduates' competitiveness and job readiness. The positive relationship observed in this study further corroborates the findings of Ramadhana et al., Khairul, and Yavish (2026), Markjackson et al. (2021), and Ghawail, Yahia, and Alrshah (2021), all of whom reported that digital and technological skills contributed significantly to employment success across different sectors. In addition, Dorđević, Milanovic Zbiljic, and Radosavljevic (2025) demonstrated that proficiency in digital tools and data-analysis software increased graduates' employability in technology-driven labour markets. The consistency between the present findings and previous studies suggests that digital competence has become a universally valued employability skill in today's economy.

The findings can be understood through the lens of the Human Capital Theory, which argues that investments in education, training, and skill acquisition enhance an individual's productivity and value in the labour market. According to the theory, digital and ICT skills constitute forms of human capital that increase workers' efficiency and ability to perform job-related tasks. The positive effect of spreadsheet and statistical software proficiency on employability observed in this study supports this theoretical proposition. Graduates who acquired these technical skills were more likely to obtain employment because employers perceive them as more productive and capable of meeting the technological demands of the financial sector. Therefore, strengthening ICT training and practical software-based learning within Economics programmes can be viewed as an investment in human capital that improves graduate employability and labour market competitiveness.

4.6.3 Soft skills and labour employability

The study found that soft skills—specifically communication and teamwork skills—do not have a statistically significant effect on the employability of Economics graduates in the financial sector. Although graduates who reported improved communication skills had a positive effect of 6.3 percentage points on employability, this relationship was not statistically significant ($p = 0.305$). Similarly, teamwork skills showed a negligible and negative effect of -0.4 percentage points, which was also statistically insignificant ($p = 0.961$). This suggests that, within the context of this study, soft skills alone do not significantly determine whether graduates secure employment in the financial sector.

These findings imply that while soft skills are generally important in workplace settings, they may not serve as decisive factors in securing initial employment in the financial sector compared to technical and analytical competencies. Financial sector employers may prioritize job-specific and quantifiable skills such as data analysis, ICT proficiency, and analytical reasoning over general interpersonal abilities during recruitment. It is also possible that soft skills are assumed or only become more relevant after employment, rather than serving as primary screening criteria for hiring. Therefore, the results suggest that soft skills, though valuable for workplace performance, may have limited influence on entry-level employability outcomes among Economics graduates in Cross River State.

The findings partially contrast with those of Attah et al. (2025), who reported that soft skills such as communication and teamwork significantly improved graduate employability in

service-oriented sectors. However, they align with Emeri (2022), who found that soft skills had limited predictive power for employment in highly technical fields where quantitative and analytical competencies are more important. In contrast, Clokie and Fourie (2016) emphasized that soft skills are critical employability attributes, particularly in enhancing workplace adaptability and professional integration, while Dahunsi (2017) also reported a positive relationship between soft skills and employability among Nigerian graduates. The divergence between the present study and some of these earlier works may be attributed to sectoral differences, as the financial sector tends to place stronger emphasis on technical and analytical competencies during recruitment than on general interpersonal skills.

From the perspective of human capital theory, soft skills represent an important component of an individual's stock of human capital because they enhance productivity, communication efficiency, and workplace collaboration. However, the theory also recognizes that different forms of human capital yield varying returns depending on labour market demands. In this case, the insignificant effect of soft skills suggests that the financial sector places higher economic value on technical and cognitive skills than on interpersonal competencies at the point of entry into employment. This does not diminish the importance of soft skills but rather indicates that their returns may be more pronounced in job performance and career progression than in initial employability. Therefore, investments in education should still include soft skill development, but they should be complemented with strong analytical and digital training to enhance graduates' overall human capital and employability outcomes.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that employability of Economics graduates in the financial sector is primarily driven by strong analytical, data analysis, and ICT skills rather than soft skills or demographic factors. Hence, the study makes the following policy recommendations:

1. Since analytical skills significantly improve employability, the National Universities Commission and sister regulatory bodies should redesign Economics programmes to include more problem-solving, quantitative reasoning, case-based learning, and applied economic analysis to better prepare graduates for financial sector demands. This can be done by introducing dedicated courses in data analytics and financial modelling, with applied projects that expose students to real-world financial datasets.
2. Given the strong positive effect of spreadsheet and statistical software skills on employability, higher institutions should make ICT training compulsory and practice-oriented, ensuring students are proficient in tools such as Excel, STATA, SPSS, EViews, and R before graduation.
3. Although soft skills, such as communication and teamwork skills, were not significant predictors of employability, tertiary education institutions should continue to teach them but integrate them into practical activities such as presentations, group projects, and internships to enhance workplace effectiveness after employment.

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QUESTIONNAIRE

Title: Effect of Education Quality on Employability of Labour in the Financial Sector: Evidence from Graduates of Economics in Cross River State

Instruction: Kindly tick (✓) the option that best describes your situation. All information provided will be treated confidentially and used solely for academic purposes.

SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Age: ☐ 20–24 years ☐ 25–29 years ☐ 30–34 years ☐ 35 years and above
3. Marital Status: ☐ Single ☐ Married ☐ Divorced/Separated ☐ Widowed
4. Type of institution attended: ☐ College of Education ☐ Polytechnic ☐ University
5. Number of years since graduation: ☐ Less than 1 year ☐ 1–2 years ☐ 3–4 years ☐ 5–6 years ☐ More than 6 years

SECTION B: EMPLOYABILITY STATUS

7. What is your current employment status?
☐ Unemployed ☐ Employed/self-employed in the financial sector
☐ Employed in another sector
8. If employed, how long did it take you to secure employment after graduation?
☐ Less than 6 months ☐ 6 months–1 year
☐ 1–2 years ☐ More than 2 years
☐ Not applicable

SECTION C: SKILLS ACQUIRED FROM ECONOMICS EDUCATION

9. Please indicate your level of analytical skill acquired from Economics education:
☐ None ☐ Poor
☐ Average ☐ Advanced
10. Can you analyse and interpret economic/financial data?
☐ No ☐ Yes
11. Can you use spreadsheet software (e.g., Excel) effectively?
☐ No ☐ Yes
12. Can you use statistical software (e.g., SPSS, STATA, EViews, R) effectively?
☐ No ☐ Yes
13. Did you acquire digital skill through your course of study?
☐ No ☐ Yes
14. Did your education improve your communication skills?
☐ No ☐ Yes
15. Did you acquire teamwork skill through your university education?
☐ No ☐ Yes

SECTION F: SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

16. Did your family provide financial support throughout your university education?
☐ No ☐ Yes
17. Did you have access to a personal computer and internet during your studies?
☐ No ☐ Yes

Thank you for your time.