



VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION JOURNAL

Print - ISSN: 2734-2697, Online: 2734-2700

2024, Vol. 4, No 1, 100-106.

©Author(s) 2024

Webite: www.votej.com.ng

VOTEJ

Employability Skills Required by Business Education Graduates for Effective Administration in the Workplace

Ogechukwu Favour Mbah

Department of Business Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Abstract

This study determines the employability skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in workplace situation. The research was conducted using a descriptive survey design with a sample of 260 managers of SMEs and staff of the Ministry of Commerce and Industries. Data was collected through a structured questionnaire validated by experts while the internal consistency of the questionnaire items was ascertained through Cronbach Alpha technique which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.89. The data collected were analyzed using mean in answering the research questions while t-test analysis was employed in testing the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that the ability to identify, recognize and define problems as well as the ability to critically analyze situations before taking decisions are employability skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in workplace situation. Based on the findings, the study recommended amongst others that institutions should give students more on-the-job training opportunities to ensure that students learn actual skills required in the workplace.

Author's Email: ogechukwu.mbah@unn.edu.ng

Keywords: Business Education, Workplace, Administration, and Employability skills

Introduction

Education remains the key to empowering individuals and nations, acting as a fundamental driver for development and progress (UNESCO, 2015). It serves as a vital tool for enhancing economic growth and national development, often described as the cornerstone of societal advancement because it lays the foundation for literacy, skill acquisition, technological progress, and knowledge generation (World Bank, 2018). Education enables individuals to harness both human and natural resources effectively, contributing significantly to a nation's economic and social welfare (Gordon & Nanda, 2018; Barro & Lee, 2013). According to Scanlon (2022), education is a discipline that is concerned with methods of teaching and learning in schools or school-like environments as opposed to various non-formal and informal means of socialization like rural development projects and education through parent-child relationships. The greatest weapon against poverty is education of the youth population (Nwangwua, 2015).

Business education as part of general education which an individual requires continuously has been built on the knowledge, skills, values and attitude learnt at the lower phases of education (Okanazu, 2023). Business education as defined by Kolesnik (2022) is a wide array of courses that are meant to teach students of various ages about the fundamental principles of business. This includes courses on business management, business law, entrepreneurship, accounting, marketing, statistics, economics, as well as computer courses among others. Udo and Bako (2017) conceptualized business education as education that provides skills, knowledge, competencies and attitudes necessary for effective employment in specific business occupations. Okorie (2016) defined business education as a broad area of knowledge that deals with the entire enterprise system—preparing recipients for roles in business as employees, entrepreneurs, employers or simply as self-employed. The above definitions means that business education is an activity-based education that leads to the acquisition of practical skills and work habits requisite for success in a chosen business occupation. Aliyu (2015) stated that the purpose of business education is to stress the need for specialized instruction to prepare students for career in business; build fundamental instruction to help students assume their economic roles as consumers, workers and citizens, and built background instruction to assist students in preparing for professional careers that required advanced study. In order words, business education is designed to produce skillful and dynamic business educators, office administrators and businessmen and women that will effectively compete in the job

market, have a sustainable development value and become successful entrepreneurs. Thus, business education as a discipline is expected to expose its recipients to diversity curricula so as to inculcate in its recipients, attitudes, knowledge, skills, values that are required in the business world of today.

With reference to this assertion, Business education students require skills to be effective in the workplace and must be taught with appropriate strategies to cultivate the right skills and attitudes (Schultz, 2017). The global job market is marked by rapid change and increased competition for jobs, necessitating employees to possess critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and excellent communication skills (Cappelli, 2016). To adapt to technological advances and the competitive work environment, it is essential to prepare graduates with the necessary skills and adaptability (Bharadwaj et al., 2018). Business education graduates are equipped with fundamental principles and theories of teaching and learning, positioning them well for various roles in the workforce (Adeyemi, 2013). In Nigeria, business education is a key component of vocational and technical education, preparing graduates for office roles such as secretaries, administrative officers, or managers (Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2018).

Workplace is described as the nerve center of any organization. Sumathy, Malini and Salai (2019) stated that the present-day office activities have widely expanded to keep pace with rapid globalization. The workplace serves as a crucial environment where individuals come together to collaborate, innovate, and contribute towards organizational goals. Research indicates that a positive work environment can boost creativity, collaboration, and team cohesion, ultimately driving innovation and competitive advantage (Gensler, 2020). To this end, workplace epitomizes the heart of an organization, embodying its values, mission, and aspirations. Administration is a process of running an organization, office or business. This includes making rules and regulations, making decisions, management of operations, organizing the staff/employees/people to direct activities towards achieving a common goal or objective (Machado, 2019). The approach in achieving the goal of business and taking decision is never static. In the dynamic world of industry and business, workplace administration is never static but always changing in the interests of greater efficiency. Osuala (2012) stated that effective office administration is a direct function of the skills possessed by the office staff. Hence, the business of the workplace can only be productive if the staff is empowered by the skills required by the workplace.

Skill is defined as expertise, practical ability, and dexterity—an organized sequence of actions

performed with proficiency (Okorie, 2018). It entails the manual dexterity achieved through repetitive practice, forming a well-established habit of performance. According to the Business Dictionary (2019), skill is the ability acquired through deliberate and systematic effort to execute complex tasks involving cognitive, technical, and interpersonal competencies. It reflects one's proficiency in executing a task effectively and independently. Uloko (2016) further describes skill as the expertise gained through learning processes, which requires training and focused consistency to achieve mastery. Ultimately, acquiring a skill means developing a habitual way of thinking and acting until it becomes second nature through practice. The acquired skills and competencies can manifest in the life of the students to assist them improve on higher standard of life in the community (Odu, 2015). Makinwa (2019) stated that skill acquisition opens new opportunities, helps one to learn something new, practice and become experts. The acquisition of prerequisite skills for securing employment positions is very vital in an organization. To acquire skills, the author stated that there must be some form of training. This is because modern technology requires a higher degree of ability and operating skills. Skills development can be accomplished through work experience or through education in school, workshop or laboratories.

Employability skills, according to Imeokparia and Ediagbonya (2019), are the skills needed by individuals to function effectively and efficiently in the world of work either as an employee or an employer of labour. Also, employability skills refer to the general skills and knowledge required for individuals to obtain, retain, and progress in employment (Skills Commission, 2008). In this context, employability skills are defined as the capabilities, authority, or competencies that enable an individual to excel in a specific job (BIS, 2014). The significance of employability skills has gained prominence in recent years, as these skills are essential qualifications for many job positions and critical for career success at various levels within a business environment (Harvey, 2001; Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2007). Essential employability skills for graduates include communication, problem-solving, decision-making, analytical and creative thinking, information synthesis, teamwork, interpersonal skills, and continuous learning, all of which are prerequisites for professional recognition (Green & Henseke, 2016; OMH, 2021). With the increasing focus on employability skills, they have become a crucial factor in the national, regional, and international labor markets (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005).

Decision-making skills are the abilities to recognize, define problems, and select appropriate actions to address them or seize opportunities. According to Valchev (2019), these skills enable

individuals to choose wisely from available options. Effective decision-making requires utilizing knowledge and skills to navigate the process successfully. Zimmerman and Kanter (2012) noted that many businesses failures stem from decision-makers lacking essential decision-making skills, which can lead to wasted resources and vague goals. Good decision-making can prevent crises, while poor decisions can complicate situations and necessitate more challenging choices later. Decision-making occurs at each step of goal setting and problem-solving, encompassing skills such as problem identification, information gathering, action development, and analyzing alternatives.

Problem solving is ability to define a problem, generate alternative solutions, evaluate and select the best from the alternatives and implement solutions to them. According to Imeokparia and Ediagbonya (2019), it is a set of activities designed to analyze a situation systematically and generate, implement, and evaluate solutions. The authors insisted that problem solving is critically an important skill area for administrators, planners, voluntary agency coordinators, and other professional managers. As a management professional, the ability to identify current and potential problems and to make sound, timely decisions before and during an emergency can significantly impact the lives and well-being of the organization (Harrison & Jeong, 2017). Effective problem-solving and decision-making skills are critical in averting tragedy and enabling organizations to recover more swiftly from adverse events (Mitroff & Dambahare, 2015; Roberts, 2000). In high-stress situations, leaders who can evaluate options and act decisively are often instrumental in guiding their organizations through crises (Kets de Vries & Balazs, 2017).

In today's competitive global economy, business education graduates play a crucial role in effective administration. Organizational success relies on a workforce that can navigate complexities, innovate, and drive growth. The rapid digital transformation and globalization have heightened the need for skills like communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, decision-making, and adaptability. Employers now prioritize candidates who can collaborate, lead teams, and foster innovation. To thrive, business education graduates must possess a diverse set of employability skills beyond traditional knowledge. Thus, the researcher aims to identify the essential employability skills needed by these graduates for effective administration among managers of SMEs and staff of Ministry of Commerce and Industries in Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

The level of success in any business is a function of the skills possessed by the business workers. Variety of occupational problems and

decisions confront every individual in the workplace today. The problems are primarily due to the increasingly complex nature of the world of work. Also, workplace management is becoming complex on daily basis because of technological innovations. It is observed that most organizations fail because employees lack decision making skills and as such do not know how to set attainable goals, plan, analyze situations, identify and solve problems for the organization. An individual's ability to identify current and potential problems and to make sound, timely decisions before and during an emergency can literally affect the lives and well-being of an organization especially a workplace. It is clear that lack of employability and workplace skills such as decision making and problem solving affect the employability and performance of some graduates. It is salient to note that without skills such as decision making and problem-solving, there would be no ability to recognize and capitalize on opportunities, or select an appropriate course of action to solve problems and this could lead to stagnation and inadequate productivity in any organization. This study therefore aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the decision-making skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in the workplace?
2. What are the problem-solving skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in the workplace?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses formulated for the study were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H0₁ There is no significant difference between the mean responses of managers of SMEs and staff of ministry of commerce and industries on the decision-making skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in the workplace.

H0₂ There is no significant difference between the mean responses of managers of SMEs and staff of Ministry of Commerce and Industries on the problem-solving skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in the workplace.

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design to identify the decision-making and problem-solving skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in the workplace. The study was carried out in registered small and medium scale enterprises and Ministry of Commerce and Industries in South-East, Nigeria. The sample for the study is comprised of 260 respondents, made up of 140 managers of SMEs and 120 staff of Ministry of Commerce and Industries in Nigeria. The instrument for data collection was a 12-item structured questionnaire developed by the researcher titled "Employability Skills Required by Business Education Graduates for Effective Administration in the workplace Questionnaire (ESRBEGEAWESQ)". The instrument was divided into two major sections (A and B) and was structured on a 5-point rating scale of Very Much Required (VMR), Required (R), Somewhat Required (SWR), Seldom Required (SR), Not Required (NR) with assigned weights of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The questionnaire was face-validated by three experts in the Department of Business Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, to ensure the reliability of the instrument. The study made use of Cronbach Alpha reliability method to determine the internal consistency of the instrument and a reliability coefficient of 0.89 was obtained. Copies of the questionnaire was administered by the researcher to the respondents with the help of two research assistants who were briefed by the researcher in order to enhance the administration and ensure high rate of return. Two hundred and sixty copies were administered and two hundred and fifty-five copies were retrieved and used for study. Data collected were analyzed using mean to answer research questions and standard deviation to determine the closeness of the responses from the mean. The data were analyzed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

Results

The results of this study were obtained based on the research questions answered.

The results from the research questions are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Research question 1: what are the decision-making skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in the work place?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on the decision-making skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in the workplace

S/N	Item Statement:	X	Sd	Rem
1	Ability to gather information and develop courses of action during decision making process	4.57	0.63	R
2	Ability to deliberate with colleagues and select the best course of action for effective decision making.	4.43	0.73	R
3	Patience is required in taking effective decision in the workplace.	3.93	0.99	R
4	Ability to identify, recognize and define the problem at hand.	4.52	0.73	R
5	Ability to analyze and compare courses of action (alternatives/solutions).	4.29	0.83	R
6	Ability to critically analyze situations before taking decision in the workplace.	4.70	0.69	R
CLUSTER MEAN		4.40	0.77	R

key: $n = 260$, \bar{X} = Mean, S.D. = Standard Deviation, R = Required, NR = Not Required

The result in Table 1 shows that the respondents agreed with the items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 with mean scores of 4.57, 4.43, 3.93, 4.52, 4.29, and 4.70 and standard deviation 0.63, 0.73, 0.99, 0.73, 0.83 and 0.69 respectively. This indicates that ability to gather information and develop courses of action during decision making process, ability to deliberate with colleagues and select the best course of action for effective decision making, patience is required in taking effective decision in the workplace, Ability to identify, recognize and define the problem at hand, ability to analyze and compare courses of action

(alternatives/solutions) and ability to critically analyze situations before taking decision in the office were areas that decision making skills are required by business education graduates for effective administration in the workplace. The grand standard deviation is 0.77 and it implied that the opinions of the respondents were close to each other.

Research Question 2: What are the problem-solving skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in the workplace?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on the problem-solving skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in the workplace

S/N	Item Statement	X	Sd	Rem
1	Ability to recognize a problem.	4.42	0.80	R
2	Ability to analyze a problem and find its causes.	4.39	0.79	R
3	Ability to think and look for as many practical alternatives as possible in terms of the time, money, skill level, or amount of energy you have to expend in solving a problem.	4.58	0.73	R
4	Learning new task in order to solve a problem	4.48	0.67	R
5	Ability to set realistic and attainable goals in office in order to get task done.	4.43	0.66	R
6	Identifying and solving problems in workplace.	4.70	0.69	R
CLUSTER MEAN		4.39	0.75	R

Key: $n = 260$, \bar{X} = Mean, S.D. = Standard Deviation, R = Required, NR = Not Required

The result in Table 2 shows that the respondents agreed with the items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 with mean scores of 4.42, 4.39, 4.58, 4.48, 4.43 and 4.05 and standard deviation 0.80, 0.79, 0.73, 0.67, 0.66 and 0.85 respectively. This indicates that ability to recognize a problem, ability to analyze a problem and find its causes, ability to think and look for as many practical alternatives as possible in terms of the time, money, skill level, or amount of energy you have to expend in solving a problem, learning new

task in order to solve a problem, ability to set realistic and attainable goals in office in order to get task done, and identifying and solving problems in workplace were areas that problem-solving skills are required by business education graduates for effective administration in the workplace. The grand standard deviation is 0.75 and it implied that the range in the responses of respondents was not far from the mean.

Discussion of the findings

The study with regards to research question one on the decision-making skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in the workplace. It was revealed that decision making skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in the workplace are ability to gather information and develop courses of action during decision making process, ability to deliberate with colleagues and select the best course of action for effective decision making, patience is required in taking effective decision in the workplace, ability to identify, recognize and define the problem at hand, ability to analyze and compare courses of action (alternatives/solutions), and ability to critically analyze situations before taking decision in the workplace were decision making skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in the workplace. This finding is in line with the view of Valchev (2019), who stated that decision making skills are the abilities that one possesses and uses to select a choice from available options. These skills are crucial in both personal and professional contexts, as they help business education graduates assess situations, consider alternatives, increase efficiency and ultimately make informed decisions. Likewise, the study with regards to research question two on the problem-solving skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in the workplace. It was revealed that problem-solving skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in the workplace are Ability to recognize a problem, Ability to analyze a problem and find its causes, Ability to think and look for as many practical alternatives as possible in terms of the time, money, skill level, or amount of energy you have to expend in solving a problem, Learning new task in order to solve a problem, Ability to set realistic and attainable goals in office in order to get

References

Arkupal, A. (2012). What is the importance of office to a modern business? Modern Office Technologies.
<http://www.modernofficetechnologies.com>

Edokpolor, C. & Egbri, T. (2017). Perceptions of organizational culture, leadership effectiveness, and personal effectiveness across six countries. *Journal of International Management*, 13(2), 204–230.

Edokpolor, J. E. & Egbri, J. N. (2017). Business education in Nigeria for value reorientation: A strategic approach for poverty alleviation and national development.

task done, and Identifying and solving problems in workplace were problem-solving skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in the workplace. This finding agreed with the assertion of Imeokparia and Edigbonya (2019), that institutions of learning should equip the would-be managers of organizations with skills like problem solving and office administrative skills. These skills enable business education graduates to tackle complex issues, overcome challenges, and make informed decisions to reach desired outcomes.

Conclusion

The study sought to determine employability skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in the workplace using survey research. The conclusion from this survey provides empirical and relevant input for practical approaches and participation in real world of work in the workplace. Graduates entering the real world of work especially in workplace should be able to gather information and develop courses of action during decision making process, analyze a problem and find its causes, invest time wisely and be punctual to work. The business education graduates are required to manage human and material resources well before fitting into workplace.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

1. Instructional delivery should be more or less practical rather than theoretical, as this will avail the students the opportunity of practicing the skills taught to them by their teachers.
2. On-the-job training opportunities should be provided to the students as relevant industries and institutions collaborate so as to enable students learn task required in the work place especially in modern offices.

Esuh, C. B. and Minnia, J. N. (2014). Categorization of office space is flexible: St. Louis Daily Record & St. Louis Countian.
<http://cat.officespace.com/2014/02/27/St.Louisdailyrecord>

Foster, B. S. A. (2013). Changing skills required by industries: Perception of what makes business graduates employable. *African Journal of Business Management*.
<http://www.academicjournals.org/2013/07/23/AJMB>

Imeokparia, P. O. & Edigbonya, K. (2019). Employability skills. *Educational Research*,

- 3(5), 2141–5161.
<https://openlearning.auekpoma.edu.ng/upload/journals/employability-of-business>
- Janos, F. (2013). Introduction to decision-making methods. Laboratory of Operations Research and Decision Systems, Computer and Automation Institute, Hungarian Academy of Sciences.
- Jacobson, A. & Swanson, R. (2014). Training students to become effective workplace leaders. <https://www.emeraldinsight.com/2017/6/24/13527590210433384>
- Machado, J. (2019). What is the concept of administration? <https://www.quora.com/2019/04/15/what-is-the-concept-of-administration>
- Makinwa, E. (2019). What is skill acquisition? <https://www.legiting.com/2019/03/25/1089233-what-skill-acquisition>
- Osuala, E. C. (2012). *Administrative office management* (Reviewed edition). Enugu: Cheston Agency Ltd.
- Rohaizat, T., Ebi, U., & Zubaidah, O. (2016). Time management vs. self-management. <http://www.thisdaylive.com/2016/08/21/articles/time-management-vs-self-management/91901/>
- Sumathy, A., Malini, H., & Salai, E. (2019). Office administration and management. <https://www.studocu.com/2019/04/16/en/document/MOI-University/human-resources-management>
- Valchev, M. (2019). Decision-making skills. Project Manager, Cutting Edge Technology in wide range of financial and telecom companies in Europe, Asia, and Africa. <https://www.businessphrases.net/2019/04/17/decision-making-skills>
- Zimmerman, P. B., & Kanter, M. R. (2012). Decision making for leaders: A synthesis of ideas from the Harvard University Advanced Leadership Think Tank. <https://advancedleadership.harvard.edu>
- Igbokwe-Ibeto, C. J. (2018). “Business Education: The Missing Link in the Nigeria Educational System”. *International Journal of Business Education and Management*.
- Dacre Pool, L., & Sewell, P. (2007). “The Key to Employability: Developing a Practical Model of Graduate Employability”. Education + Training.