



Employability Skills Required by Business Education Graduates for Engagement and Sustainable Future in Delta State

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Abstract

The study sought to ascertain the employability skills required of business education graduates for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State. Survey design was used. The population was 346 Business Educators, Business education graduates and employers of labour in Delta State. Sample was 104 and proportionate sampling technique was utilized. A structured questionnaire was employed, which was validated by three experts. Reliability of the instrument was measured using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), achieving a reliability coefficient of 0.75. All 104 copies of the instrument were administered to respondents and successfully retrieved. Mean, standard deviation and t-test were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that problem-solving and critical thinking skills are highly required employability skills by business education graduates, for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State. The study concluded that Business education graduates need digital literacy and technology skills as part of their employability skills to ensure their engagement and sustainable future in Delta State. It was recommended that Heads of Departments of Business Education should ensure that students are digitally literate as the 21st century employers expect graduates to be proficient in using digital technology.

Keywords: Employability Skills; Business Education; Graduates; Engagement; Sustainable Future.



Introduction

The 21st century is characterized by numerous technological advancement such that the modern skills required for employment and sustainable future has tremendously changed. Hence, the business education graduates require employability or modern skills for engagement and sustainable future. Employability is an individual's possession of the traits and skills required to satisfy the changing needs of employers and consumers, thereby helping to achieve goals and prospects in work (CBI, 1999, in Ronald & Colin, 2005). Employability also refers to the development of skilled and flexible workforces, in which all persons eligible of working are motivated to acquire the skills, knowledge, technology, and adaptability necessary to enter and remain in employment during their working lives. (Treasury as cited by Wilbrow, 2011). Further, Dacre and Sewell as cited in Ugbe (2018) contend that employability is a disputed dialog involving global actors and local governments, employers, industry, students and academic associations, professional governing bodies, and quality assurance and accreditation agencies. Employability skills on the other hand are set of highly desirable and transferable skills that turns an individual into an attractive candidate or employee (Duszynski in Ugonwa, 2023, Zsuzsanna, 2023). While Amesi and Babalola (2022) affirmed that employability skills are transferable skills needed by an individual to make him or her suitable and employable.

Again, employability skills can be described as the ability of a graduate to possess skills required for modern engagement. These skills are non-technical skills needed to get a job done, which are also known as soft skills, employment skills, work-readiness skills or foundational skills. These skills are important as they make an applicant to be more attractive to employers and to stand out among other job seekers who are applying for the same position. These skills may not be job-specific, but they play an important role in improving the performance and value of employees in the workstation because they are highly valued by employers and industry (Wilbrow, 2011).

On the other hand, employability skills could also be seen as those skills and competencies that make a person attractive to employers and enable them to be effective in the workplace. According to Babalola (2017) graduates of tertiary institutions are required to develop employability skills needed for employment after graduation. While sustainability is the ability to maintain or support a process continuously over time. Whereas, sustainable future indicates a process of moving towards a consistent resource-efficient circular economy and by turning away from the predominantly linear economy which produces waste. To achieve a sustainable future, it requires a collective effort from individuals, organizations, government and societies to prioritize long-term thinking, social responsibility and environmental stewardship. Consequently, many businesses and governments have committed to sustainable goals, such as reducing their environmental footprints and conserving resources.

Ugonwa (2023) carried out a study on employability skills required of business education graduates in Delta State and found in the study that business education graduates need global employability skills such as problem-solving skills, communication skills, team work skills, technology skills, and resilience. She further found that male and female business educators do not differ significantly in their mean rating on global employability skills required of business education graduates in Delta State. In another study conducted by Iwu (2019) it was found that graduates of business education should possess global skills such as communication skills, problem solving skills, leadership skills etc. to make them fit into the world of work.



Business education refers to the academic discipline that focuses on teaching students the skills, knowledge, and values required to succeed in business and management careers. It encompasses different disciplines such as accounting, office technology and management, marketing and entrepreneurship. However, the business education graduates in Delta State need to be well trained to possess employability skills required for engagement and sustainable future. These skills include communication skills, teamwork and collaboration skills, problem-solving and critical thinking skills, digital literacy and technology skills, time management skills, resilience and stress management skills. However, for the purpose of this study the employability skills to be considered are critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and digital literacy and technology skills.

Problem-solving and critical thinking skills enable an individual to learn how to think critically, examine all sides of a problem, and understand the outcomes of their actions. Problem-solving skills are included as one of the most critical skills required by young graduates to thrive. Emeasoba and Nwatarali in Okorie (2022) postulated that one of the aims of education in the 21st century is to produce graduates who are skillful of using their knowledge in problem solving, developing strategies, and transferring knowledge. Ubulom and Enyekit (2022) carried out an investigation on Business education students' skills acquisition for self-reliant in prevailing recessed economic system in Rivers State, Nigeria and found that critical thinking and problem-solving skills are required by Business Education students for self-reliant in prevailing recessed economic system. In another study conducted by Okorie (2022) it was noted that problem-solving skills are required for effective job performance of business education graduates. Yet, in a study carried out by Oduma and Ile (2024), it was discovered that the problem-solving competencies required by employers of business education graduates for effective job performance in organizations are ability to be innovative, possession of varied wealth of experience in office occupations, ability to be critical in thinking, and the ability to brainstorm etc. Further, in a fast-changing world, organizations need employees who can solve problems, provide ideas and help enhance the establishments with their knowledge of digital technology since most of the equipment and facilities use in organizations in the 21st century is digital in nature.

Digital literacy and technology skills involves the proficiency in using digital devices such as laptops, tablets, and smartphones in the digital age to access the internet to discover, create, review, evaluate, and use information through various digital platforms. Digital literacy has not only altered educational standards but also have a strong hold on employability skills required for engagement and sustainable development (Ufondu, et al., 2024). Computer literacy skill is very important in the modern workplace. This was buttressed by Amoor (2021) who found that the use of word-processing and spreadsheet are required to be possessed by the modern secretaries. Also, majority of modern offices are technologically equipped, and this require employees with computer literacy. Furthermore, Oguejifor and Ikedimma (2021) stated that ICT skills are basic requirements for effective job performance. Business Education graduates require information and communication technology skills for effective job performance (Udie & Nwosu, 2023). Udie and Nwosu (2023) found in their study that there is no significant difference in the mean response of male and female employers of labour on the communication skills required of Business Education graduates for effective job performance in modern offices. Also, Akpojotor (2024) found in her study that digital communication skills are highly needed by graduates of business education for employability and global competitiveness. In another study conducted by Ubulom and Enyekit (2022) on Business education students skills acquisition for self-reliance in prevailing recessed economic system in Rivers State, Nigeria found that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of



the responses of male and female business students on critical thinking and problem-solving skills for self-reliant in prevailing recessed economic system. Based on the above findings, this study conducted an empirical assessment on employability skills required by Business education graduates for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State.

Statement of the Problem

Business education programme ought to prepare its students with numerous skills for teaching and entrepreneurship as graduates of this programme are expected to possess certain skills required for employment. However, tertiary institutions seem to turn out graduates who have not been able to meet the expectations of the labour market because their graduates seem to lack the basic skills required for employment and this trend results in mass unemployment among graduates and Nigerian youth (Ezeonwurie, 2019). Consequently, the consistent increase in the rate of unemployment and underemployment in Nigeria is terrifying with the high unemployment rate of 37.1% (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

Accordingly, this high rate of unemployment calls for major concern as graduates of business education programme seems to flood the streets looking for white collar jobs while some who are employed are underemployed. Also, a good number of the graduates seems not to possess the required skills for self-employment and sustainable future. What could be the possible cause of this trend? Could it be that Business education graduates are unemployed or underemployed because of lack of employability skills required? Based on the aforementioned, there is need for Business education programme to accommodate adequate employability skills that will improve graduates' engagement and sustainable future. Therefore, the researcher deems it necessary to embark on the study, employability skills required by Business education graduates for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised and answered in the study.

1. What is the problem solving and critical thinking skills required in improving business education graduates' employability skills for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State?
2. What are the digital literacy and technology skills required in improving business education graduates' employability skills for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses guided the study and were tested at 0.05 level of significant.

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female respondents on problem solving and critical thinking skills require in improving business education graduates' employability skills for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female respondents on digital literacy and technology skills require in improving business education graduates' employability skills for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State.



Methods

The study adopted the survey research design. This design was considered most appropriate since it seek individuals' opinion, attitudes and perception (Nwogu, 2005). The population of the study was 346 respondents made up of 136 Business Educators from tertiary institutions in Delta State, 160 Business education graduates employed in industries in Delta State and 50 employers of labour in Delta State (Office of the Heads of Department of Business Education, 2024; Delta State Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mines and Agriculture, 2024). The sample size was 104 respondents which is 30% of the population, this was obtained with the use of proportionate sampling technique. Instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher. It was titled Employability Skills for Engagement and Sustainable Future Questionnaire (ESESFQ). It was rated on a four-point Likert type rating scale of Most Highly Required (MHR) = 4 points, Highly Required (HR) = 3 points, Slightly Required (SR) = 2 points and Not Required (NR) = 1 point. The instrument was validated by three experts. Two of the experts from Department of Business Education, Delta State University, Abraka and one from Measurement and Evaluation Unit, University of Benin, Benin-City. A pilot test was conduct on 25 respondents made up of 10 Business Educators, 10 Business Education graduates and 5 employers of labour in Edo State who were not part of the study. The test-retest method was utilized and the instrument was administered twice within an interval of two weeks and the data obtained was subjected to Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) and a reliability coefficient of 0.75 was obtained. Copies of the instruments were administered personally by the researcher with the help of two research assistants to respondents. All the copies of the instrument administered were retrieved making it 100% returned rate.

Data obtained from the respondents were analyzed using Mean and standard deviation to answer research questions while t-test was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significant. All computations were carried out with the use of SPSS v23.00. The decision rule was that any calculated mean that was 3.50 and above was considered as Most Highly Required, 2.50 to 3.49 was considered as Highly Required, 1.50 to 2.49 was considered Slightly Required and 1.49 and below was considered Not Required. For the null hypothesis, when the p-value was less than or equal to 0.05 level of significant the null hypothesis was rejected but, when p-value was greater than 0.05 level of significant the null hypothesis was retained.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the problem solving and critical thinking skills required in improving Business Education graduates' employability skills for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State?



Table 1: Mean and standard deviation rating of respondents on problem solving and critical thinking skills required in improving business education graduates' employability skills

S/N	Statement	X	SD	Decision
1.	Critical thinking by way of analyzing complex business problems, identifying key issues and developing well-reasoned solutions	3.14	0.56	HR
2.	Strategic thinking by way of developing innovative strategies to address business challenges and opportunities	3.36	0.64	HR
3.	Creative problem-solving by way of generating novel solution to complex business problems	3.42	0.78	HR
4.	Data-driven decision making by way of collecting, analyzing and interpreting data to inform business decisions.	2.94	0.89	HR
5.	Collaborative problem-solving by way of working with various stakeholders effectively to resolve business problems.	3.10	0.52	HR
6.	Adaptive problem solving by way of responding to changing business environments when required and remain open to new information.	3.06	0.46	HR
7.	Resilience that is having ability to persist through obstacles, learn from failures and maintain a growth mindset.	3.12	0.76	HR
8.	Effective communication ie. ability to clearly articulate business problems/solutions and ideas to diverse stakeholders.	3.28	0.54	HR
9.	Resourcefulness that is ability to control available resource, find alternative solutions, and being efficient.	3.18	0.63	HR
10.	Logical reasoning that is, ability to use sound judgment, deduction and inference to arrive at conclusions.	3.43	0.72	HR
Cluster Mean/SD		3.20	0.65	HR

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Data in Table 1 revealed that all the 10 items in the scale had a mean rating of 2.94 to 3.43 and a cluster mean of 3.20 which indicated that problem solving skills is highly require to improve Business Education graduates' employability skills for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State. Also, the standard deviation for the items ranges from 0.46 to 0.89 with a cluster standard deviation of 0.65 disclosing that the respondents were not far apart in their mean responses.

Research Question 2: What are the digital literacy and technology skills required in improving business education graduates' employability skills for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation rating of respondents on digital literacy and technology skills required in improving business education graduates' employability skills

S/N	Statement	X	SD	Decision
11.	Proficiency in using computers, laptops, and mobile devices	3.68	0.68	MHR
12.	Ability to collaborate using digital tools like Slack, Trello and Google Workspace	3.02	0.96	HR
13.	Effective communication through email, social media and instant messaging platforms.	3.74	0.72	MHR
14.	Understanding of data interpretation, visualization and analysis using tools like Excel, Tableau and Power BI.	3.26	0.64	HR
15.	Knowledge of Cybersecurity and best practices to protect personal and organizational assets.	3.37	0.56	HR
16.	Knowledge of cloud-based services like Google Drive, Dropbox, and Microsoft OneDrive.	3.17	0.76	HR
17.	Basic understanding of AI Concepts, applications and implications.	3.55	0.88	MHR
18.	Digital marketing knowledge such as online marketing principles, social media marketing and search engine optimization (SEO).	3.40	0.82	HR
19.	Ability to learn and adapt to new digital tools and platforms.	3.21	0.54	HR
20.	Ability to understand digital citizenship, online etiquette, and responsible technology use.	3.36	0.98	HR
21.	Effective search strategies and critical evaluation of online source.	3.05	0.66	HR
22.	Ability to create interactive and dynamic data visualizations	2.89	0.83	HR
23.	Knowledge of digital project management tools like Asana, Jira and Basecamp	2.66	0.77	HR
Cluster Mean/SD		3.26	0.75	HR

Source: Fieldwork, 2024

Data obtained in Table 2 indicated that 3 items (11, 13 and 17) had a mean rating of 3.55, 3.68 and 3.74 respectively which indicated that they are most highly required. While the remaining 10 items on the Table had a mean rating of 2.66 to 3.40, indicating that they were highly required. However, the cluster mean of 3.26 indicated that digital literacy and technology skills are highly required by business education graduates for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State. While the standard deviation ranged from 0.54 to 0.98 with a cluster SD of 0.75 showed that the respondents were close in their mean responses.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female respondents on problem solving and critical thinking skills require in improving business education graduates' employability skills for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State.

Table 3: t-test Analysis of male and female Respondents' Mean responses on problem solving and critical thinking skills require in improving business education graduates' employability skills

Variable (Gender)	N	Mean	SD	df	α	t	p-value	Decision
Male	48	3.22	0.68	102	0.05	1.48	0.26	NS
Female	56	3.19	0.64					

Data presented in Table 3 indicated that the t-value on problem solving and critical thinking skills require in improving business education graduates' employability skills for engagement and sustainable future is 1.48 while the p-value is 0.26. Since, p-value is greater than the alpha value of 0.05 ($0.26 > 0.05$), the null hypothesis was retained. Therefore, there was no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female respondents on problem solving and critical thinking skills required in improving business education graduates' employability skills for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State. Therefore, the null hypothesis was retained.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female respondents on digital literacy and technology skills require in improving business education graduates' employability skills for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State.

Table 4: t-test Analysis of male and female Respondents' Mean responses on digital literacy and technology skills require in improving business education graduates' employability skills

Variable (Gender)	N	Mean	SD	df	α	t	p-value	Decision
Male	48	3.27	0.74	102	0.05	0.86	0.14	NS
Female	56	3.24	0.71					

Data presented in Table 4 illustrated that the t-value on digital literacy and technology skills require in improving business education graduates' employability skills for engagement and sustainable future is 0.86 while the p-value is 0.14. Since, p-value is greater than the alpha value of 0.05 ($0.14 > 0.05$), the null hypothesis was retained. Therefore, there was no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female respondents on digital literacy and technology skills required in improving business education graduates' employability skills for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State.

Discussions

Findings of the study showed that problem solving and critical thinking skills are highly required to improve Business Education graduates' employability skills for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State. This finding is in harmony with the findings of Ubulom and Enyekit (2022) that that critical thinking and problem-solving skills are required by Business Education students for self-reliant in prevalent recessed economic system. Also, the finding



upholds that of Iwu (2019) that graduates of business education should possess global skills such as communication skills, problem solving skills, leadership skills etc. to make them fit into the world of work. The finding support that of Okorie (2022) who found that problem-solving skills are required for effective job performance of business education graduates. In addition, the finding harmonized with that of Oduma and Ile (2024), who found that the problem-solving competencies required by employers of business education graduates for effective job performance in organizations are ability to be innovative, possession of varied wealth of experience in office occupations, ability to be critical in thinking, and the ability to brainstorm.

The Finding of research question two indicated that digital literacy and technology skills are highly required to improve Business Education graduates' employability skills for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State. This finding is in line with the findings of Ufondu, et al., (2024) who found that digital literacy has not only altered educational standards but also have a strong influence on employability skills required for engagement and sustainable development. Also, the findings harmonized that of Akpojotor (2024) who found that digital communication skills are highly needed by graduates of business education for employability and global competitiveness. Again, the finding equally verifies that of Amoor (2021) that the use of word-processing and spreadsheet are required to be possessed by the modern secretaries. Additionally, the study finding is in line with Oguejifor and Ikedimma (2021) who affirmed that ICT skills are basic requirements for effective job performance. The finding also harmonized with Udie and Nwosu (2023) who found that Business Education graduates require information and communication technology skills for effective job performance.

Furthermore, the findings of hypothesis one disclosed that there was no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female respondents on problem solving and critical thinking skills require in improving business education graduates' employability skills for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State. This finding is in harmony with the findings of Ubulom and Enyekit (2022) who found that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of male and female business students on critical thinking and problem-solving skills for self-reliant in prevailing recessed economic system.

Likewise, the finding of hypothesis two disclosed that there was no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female respondents on digital literacy and technology skills require in improving business education graduates' employability skills for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State. This finding corroborates with that of Udie and Nwosu (2023) that found in their study that there was no significant difference in the mean response of male and female employers of labour on the communication skills required of Business Education graduates for effective job performance in modern offices.

Conclusion

Based on the study findings, it was concluded that business education graduates require problem solving and critical thinking skills. Also, that they need digital literacy and technology skills as part of their employability skills to ensure their engagement and sustainable future in Delta State. This implied that graduates of business education programme should possess these soft skills as they will enhance their employability skills and increase their chances of being selected for employment. It was also concluded that gender does not significantly influence respondents mean rating on problem solving and critical thinking skills also on digital literacy and technology skills required to improve the business education graduates employability skills for engagement and sustainable future in Delta State.



Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, it was recommended that:

1. Curriculum planners should ensure that curriculum of business education programme incorporate these employability skills that are required by students for engagement and sustainable future upon graduation since it will enhance their chances of securing employment immediately after graduation.
2. Heads of Departments of Business Education should ensure that students are digitally literate as the 21st century employers expect graduates to be proficient in using digital technology.



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