

BUSINESS EDUCATION STUDENTS' TECHNICAL SKILLS ACQUISITION AND EMPLOYABILITY POTENTIALS OF UNDERGRADUATES IN BAYELSA STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the influence of technical skills acquisition on the employability potential of undergraduates in Bayelsa State. A descriptive research design was used to carry out the study. The population of the study consisted of 499 undergraduates in business education from the three tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. A simple random sampling technique was used to draw a sample size of 217 undergraduates, which was informed by the Krejcie and Morgan sampling table. The instrument was validated and tested for reliability, with a reliability index of 0.787 derived through Pearson's Product Moment Correlation statistic. Out of the 217 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 213 copies were retrieved and used for further analysis. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions, while the null hypotheses were tested using analysis of variance (ANOVA) at the 0.05 significance level. The findings of the study revealed, among other things, that there is no significant difference in the extent to which technical skill acquisition enhances the employability potential of undergraduates among the tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. The study concluded that it has become imperative that the educational system be remodelled to provide appropriate and well-rounded business education programmes in tertiary institutions that enhance the employability skills of students and graduates from such institutions to be more employable in an increasingly competitive job market. The study, therefore, recommended, among others, that curriculum developers for the business education program should set up a joint curriculum of entrepreneurial and technical skills and training that will aid undergraduates in formulating a sustainable business plan, enhance confidence, expand technical skill development, and equip them with adequate skills to thrive in the workplace.

Keywords: Technical Skills Acquisition, Business Education Students, Employability Potential

INTRODUCTION

The word "employment" in today's globalized economy has not always had the same meaning that it had in the nineteenth century; when jobs were plentiful, the requirements to secure a job in a public or private establishment were minimal and less demanding. However, as economic, social, and technological advancements transformed the labour market, employers became more selective in the types of employees they hired and the types of skills that were required of their employees. Unfortunately, irrespective of the changes in the way employers of today approach the work environment in terms of the skills required of a prospective employee, the principles of business education taught in tertiary institutions have often failed to recognise the changing nature of employment opportunities in Nigeria. This can be adduced to be one of the main challenges that educational institutions face in the modern era and may be one of the causes of the alarming rate of unemployment among graduates of Nigerian tertiary institutions. Business education has always been viewed as a program of study that prepares individuals with a variety of skills for teaching as well as entrepreneurial abilities for self-sufficiency. Over time, recipients of the program are expected to use the acquired skills to generate employment by putting the entrepreneurial skills learned in the program into practice. This does not appear to be the case for program graduates, as several skills remain unemployed after graduation. While Osundu (2013) observed that business education graduates roam the streets looking for white-collar jobs due to

a lack of skills required to compete in their fields of specialization. It can be deduced that the increasing number of graduates who remain unemployed is as a result of the fact that they lack entrepreneurial skills. As such, it can be argued that the introduction of entrepreneurship education could just be the solution to the lack of job opportunities, for business education graduates.

With mounting pressure on tertiary institutions, educational stakeholders are beginning to question the relevance of business education programs in the current academic system in assisting students' acquisition of entrepreneurship skills and how these skills acquired could help them gain employment in their industry of choice. Therefore, the problem of this study could be posed as; does entrepreneurship skill acquisition enhance the employability potential of business education students in Bayelsa State? It is based on the assumption that the lack of entrepreneurship skill acquisition among business education students in Bayelsa State is the reason for their inability to secure employment in either public or private establishments due to their lack of employability potential. Therefore, this study is being conducted to determine the influence of business education students' entrepreneurship skills acquisition on the employability potential of undergraduates in Bayelsa State.

Purpose of the Study

1. Examine how technical skill acquisition enhances the employability potential of undergraduates in Bayelsa State-owned tertiary institutions.

Research Question

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does technical skill acquisition enhance the employability potential of undergraduates in Bayelsa State-owned tertiary institutions?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at the 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the extent to which technical skill acquisition enhances the employability potential of undergraduates among the tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State.

Entrepreneurship Skills Acquisition

Entrepreneurial skills acquisition can be obtained through various avenues such as: attending entrepreneurial training classes, development programs, seminars, workshops, etc.; universities; job rotation; special (intensive) training; article-ship or apprenticeship; organizational learning; R&D institutions; consultants; national and international agencies and bodies; non-governmental organizations (NGOs); and professional bodies (Odia & Odia 2013). Cooney (2012) viewed entrepreneurial skills as inner discipline, the ability to take risks, innovative, change-orientated, and persistence.

Entrepreneurial skills acquisition is said to be the necessary set of skills required to be an entrepreneur. In other words, entrepreneurial skills acquisition is the acquisition of those necessary skills an entrepreneur needs to successfully run a business or add value to work. Agu et al. (2013) argued that acquisition skills must be nurtured through proper education so that they can be directed to responsible and enriching small business endeavours that will benefit the individuals and the communities in which the entrepreneurs live. Entrepreneurship skills acquisition can also be defined as those skills that an individual should possess to enable him/her to succeed in a virtual learning environment.

Entrepreneurial skill acquisition can be defined as the ability to create something new with value by devoting the necessary time and effort, assuming the accompanying financial, psychological, and social risks, and receiving the resulting rewards of monetary and personal satisfaction and independence (Hisrich & Peters, 2002). Entrepreneurial skill acquisition is the ability of an individual to exploit an idea and create an enterprise (small or large) not only for personal gain but also for

social and developmental gain (Olagunju, 2004). Formal descriptions/definitions characterize entrepreneurial skills acquisition as the ability to have self-belief, boldness, tenacity, passion, empathy, readiness to take expert advice, a desire for immediate results, visionary, and the ability to recognize opportunity (Salgado-banda, 2005).

Kilby (2001) states that the array of possible entrepreneurial skills encompasses the perception of economic opportunity, technical and organizational innovations, gaining command over scarce resources, taking responsibilities for internal management, and external advancement of the firm in all aspects. The acquisition of skills as a fundamental ability is the means by which man adjusts to life (Adeyemo, 2003). A person's attitude and work functions are required, and necessary antidotes recommend the appropriate skill performance and acquisition by going through a given work sample.

In the work place, skill is what the workers give in exchange for remuneration. If the skill (or the cluster of skills popularly referred to as aptitudes) given is satisfactory, the worker gets satisfaction and the employer gets satisfaction in correspondence. This process, if sustained, culminates in promotion, retaining, and prolonged tenure that leads to productivity (Adeyemo, 2003). A skill is defined as a level of performance that does not rely solely on a person's basic, innate abilities but must be developed through training, practice, and experience. Although skill depends essentially on learning, it also includes the concepts of efficiency and economy in performance. Modern concepts of skill stress the flexibility with which a skilled operator reaches a given end on different occasions, according to precise circumstances. However, it must be reiterated that even though basic human capacities are not sufficient to produce skills, they form the necessary basis of their development.

A. Technical skills

Technical skills are the specialized knowledge and expertise required to perform specific tasks and use specific tools and programs in real-world situations. Diverse technical skills are required in just about every field and industry, from IT and business administration to health care and education. In fact, many entry-level positions across industries require basic technical skills such as cloud computing in Google Drive and navigating social media platforms (Brown & Hesketh, 2004). Examples of more advanced technical skills that a job might require include programming languages, technical writing, or data analysis.

Technical skills refer to the specialized knowledge and expertise needed to accomplish complex actions, tasks, and processes relating to computational and physical technology as well as a diverse group of other enterprises. Those who possess technical skills are often referred to as "technicians," with the expression referring to audio technicians, electronics technicians, market technicians, computer technicians, engineering technicians, and a variety of other designations (Imeokparia & Edigbonya, 2012).

Technical skills are measurable. To succeed and secure a leadership role, you should fully understand your industry and what each member of the team does to further the goals of the organization (Okereke & Okorafor, 2011). However, it will also help to develop technical skills in other areas, including the ability to market and come up with different ways to sell the organization's products or services. Most technical skills require experience and training to master, which sets them apart from softer conceptual skills.

Concept of Employability

Employability is the capability to move self-sufficiently within the labor market to realize one's potential through sustainable employment. Meanwhile, the employability of an individual depends on the knowledge, skills, and abilities they possess. Hind and Moss (2011) see employability as the capability to gain and maintain employment. It means a person's capability of gaining initial employment, maintaining employment, and obtaining new employment if required. In simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. In the work of Overtoon (2000), employability means "having essential, functional, and enabling knowledge,

skills, and attitudes required by the millennium workplace, necessary for career success at all levels of education".

Employability is being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. Employability refers to a person's capability of gaining initial employment, maintaining employment, and obtaining new employment if required (Hillage & Poland, 2008). In simple terms, employability is about being capable of getting and keeping fulfilling work. More comprehensively, employability is the capacity to be more self-sufficient within the labour market to realize potential through sustainable employment. For individuals, employability depends on the knowledge, skills, and abilities they possess, the way they use those assets and present them to employers, and the context (e.g., personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek work. Employability is a two-sided equation, and many individuals need various forms of support to overcome the physical and mental barriers to learning and personal development (i.e., updating their assets). Employability is not just about vocational and academic skills. Individuals need relevant and usable labor market information to help them make informed decisions about the labor market options available to them. They may also need support to realize when such information would be useful and to interpret that information and turn it into intelligence.

Existing definitions of employability can be broadly divided into three categories. The first group emphasizes individuals' abilities (Sanders & Grip, 2004; Yorke, 2006; De Vos et al., 2011; Hogan et al., 2013). These definitions are consistent with the notion that an individual's employability is determined by personal assets or intrinsic characteristics. While Hillage and Pollard (2008) refer to it as capability, Yorke (2006) refers to it as a set of accomplishments-skills, understandings, and personal attributes-and De Vos et al. (2011) refer to it as capabilities and willingness. These definitions emphasize the absolute dimensions of employability, which relate to whether individuals have the necessary capabilities, skills, and attitudes (Morrison, 2012).

The definition of the second group focused on the relative dimensions of employability. They frequently criticize individual capacity definitions for ignoring the fact that employability is primarily determined by the labor market (Brown et al., 2003; Sin & Amaral, 2017). Brown et al. (2003), for example, define employability as the "relative chances of finding and maintaining different types of employment." External factors such as social, institutional, and economic factors can all have an impact on employability (Sin & Amaral, 2017).

The literature has paid little attention to the relative dimensions of employability. Some conceptions of employability frequently overlook the interaction of social structures such as gender, race, social class, and disability with labor market opportunities (McGinn & Oh, 2017). However, relative dimensions can be critical. Ethnicity, for example, may have an impact on employability because some employers discriminate on job applications. In the United Kingdom, while 53.3% of white university leavers were working full-time six months after graduation, only 42% of minority ethnic university leavers were (Davies, 2014). To fully understand the concept of employability, we will need to understand relevant political, social, and economic contexts, as well as how these factors intersect with one another (Speight et al., 2012).

The third set of definitions emphasizes the "duality of employability" (Brown et al., 2003), or the importance of understanding both absolute and relative dimensions of employability. Small et al. (2018), for example, define employability as "the ability to navigate the labor market independently, utilizing knowledge, individual skills, and attributes and adapting them to the employment context, showcasing them to employers, while taking into account external and other constraints." The interaction of disciplined training and the application of subject-specific skills in the workplace is part of this duality. As industries and career paths evolve, graduates are expected to have skills that are not only discipline-specific but also transferable to a wider range of jobs and careers (Williams et al., 2019).

These latter definitions not only acknowledge the importance of personal characteristics that make a graduate more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, but also emphasize the impact of external factors on employability opportunities. While these definitions

place the individual and their skills and competencies within a specific social context (Holmes, 2013; Vuksanovic et al., 2014), skills and competencies are essential and must be acquired.

In recent years, the concept of employability has remained a focal point for the government, employers, job seekers, and educators. Brown and Hesketh (2004) explain that employability is the relative chances of getting and maintaining different kinds of employment. For individuals, employability depends on the knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSA) they possess, the way they present those assets to employers, and the context (e.g., personal circumstances and labour market environment) within which they seek employment. A major concern of graduates is what constitutes employability skills.

According to Kazilan et al. (2009), employability skills, which are synonymous with entrepreneurial skills, refer to a group of important skills instilled in each individual to become a productive workforce member. According to Imeokparia and Ediagbonya (2012), employability refers to a person's capability of gaining and maintaining employment. Employability skills or entrepreneurial skills are the skills needed by an individual to function effectively and efficiently in the world of work, either as an employee or an employer of labour. Specifically, entrepreneurial skills are very important for success in self-employment.

Skill Acquisition Theory

The theory was developed by Robert Dekeyser in 2007. The theory postulates that development in knowledge has three stages: declarative, procedural, and automatic. Declarative knowledge refers to explicit knowledge about a topic; procedural knowledge is implicit knowledge that refers to behavior. In addition, automaticity occurs at the end of extensive practice, when a person has become completely expert in performing a task. From the perspective of skill acquisition theory, the sequence of these stages is crucial, as is the appropriate combination of abstract rules and concrete examples at the declarative stage (Dekeyser, 2007 cited in Adebayo et al., 2020).

The basic claim of skill acquisition theory, according to Dekeyser (2007), is that the learning of a wide variety of skills shows a remarkable similarity in development from initial representation of knowledge through initial changes in behavior to eventual fluent, spontaneous, largely effortless, and highly skilled behavior, and that this set of phenomena can be accounted for by a set of basic principles common to the acquisition of all skills. As mentioned by Speelman (2005), skill acquisition can be considered a specific form of learning, where learning has been defined as "the representation of information in memory concerning some environmental or cognitive event." Therefore, according to him, skill acquisition is a form of learning where "skilled behaviors can become rote and even automatic under some conditions."

Implication of skill acquisition theory to the study

The skill acquisition theory relates to this study, which focuses on the influence of business education students' entrepreneurship skills acquisition on the employability potential of undergraduates in Bayelsa State in the sense that skill acquisition is task-oriented and there is a need to diagnose a task and break it down into its components in order to provide effective feedback. When it is not possible to conceptualize a task, then feedback becomes considerably less effective. The theory, if adopted when business education students learn entrepreneurship, as suggested by this study, will be effective in furthering employability and economic growth. The theory will be helpful to business education undergraduates who are aspiring to be entrepreneurs, in their career development and in realising that the pathway of entrepreneurship requires the assessment of task complexity before the establishment of the business. The cognitive phase requires the identification and development of component parts of the skill, which involves the formation of a mental picture of the skill. Then, through practice, the various components of the skill will be linked together. In addition, constant practice will make the skill become automatic and routine.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of this study consisted 499 undergraduates of business education from the three tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State that offered business education as a course. The institutions included, Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education, Sagbama, Federal University Otuoke, and Niger Delta University Yenagoa. The simple random sampling technique was used to select the sample of the study, so as to give equal opportunity to every students to participate in the study. Furthermore, the Bowley proportional allocation formula was used to ascertain the individual sample size for each of the tertiary institutions. The intention was to get a reliable representation from each tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. The sample of the study consisted of 217 undergraduates. The sample size was based on the recommendation of the Krejcie and Morgan table (Detail in Appendix A). However, based on the distribution of Table 3.2, the students used for the study was proportionally drawn from the three selected tertiary institutions. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured 30-item questionnaire. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while the null hypotheses were tested using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) at the 0.05 significance level. The data analyses were carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.

Results

Research Question One: How does technical skill acquisition enhance the employability potential of undergraduates in Bayelsa State-owned tertiary institutions?

Table 4.1: Mean score and standard deviation of how technical skill acquisition enhance the employability potential of undergraduates in Bayelsa State-owned tertiary institutions

S/N	Items	Respondents (n=213)		
		\bar{x}	SD	Decision
.1	The use of ICT to solve accounting problems enhances the employability potential of undergraduates of business education	3.040	1.004	Accept
.2	The ability to solve business mathematical problems enhances the employability potential of undergraduates of business education	3.220	0.890	Accept
.3	Reasoning logically over business transactions enhances the employability potential of undergraduates of business education	3.480	0.501	Accept
.4	The ability to estimate business expenses and income enhances the employability potential of undergraduates of business education	3.120	0.855	Accept
.5	The ability to identify a break-even point enhances the employability potential of undergraduates of business education	3.200	0.706	Accept
.6	The ability to implement a market strategy enhances the employability potential of undergraduates of business education	3.160	0.656	Accept
	Grand Mean	3.203		

(Criterion Mean = 2.5, Mean \geq 2.5 = Accept, Mean < 2.5 = Reject).

Table 4.1 shows how technical skill acquisition enhances the employability potential of undergraduates in Bayelsa State-owned tertiary institutions. The result indicated that the majority of the respondents agreed to items 1-6 with their mean scores greater than or equal to the criterion mean (2.5). Among others, the use of ICT to solve accounting problems enhances the employability potentials of undergraduates of business education, and the ability to solve business mathematical problems enhances the employability potentials of undergraduates of business education. The implication of the finding with a grand mean of 3.203 is that technical skill acquisition strongly enhances the employability potential of undergraduates in Bayelsa State-owned tertiary institutions.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the extent to which technical skill acquisition enhances the employability potential of undergraduates among the tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State.

Table 4.6: Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) on the difference in the extent to which technical skill acquisition enhances the employability potential of undergraduates among the tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State

ANOVA					
Sources	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.315	2	1.158	0.217	0.805
Within Groups	1117.751	210	5.323		
Total	1120.066	212			

Table 4.6 shows the difference in the extent to which technical skill acquisition enhances the employability potential of undergraduates among the tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. The result indicated that $F_2 = 0.217$, $df = 210$, $P = 0.805 > 0.050$. Since, $P > 0.050$, then there is no significant difference in the extent to which technical skill acquisition enhances the employability potential of undergraduates among the tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. Hence, the null hypothesis one is retained at a 0.05 level of significance.

Discussion of Findings

The study investigated the influence of business education students' entrepreneurship skills acquisition on the employability potential of undergraduates in Bayelsa State. However, the result in Table 4.1 showed that the acquisition of technical skills strongly enhances the employability potential of undergraduates in Bayelsa State-owned Tertiary Institutions. Furthermore, the result of Table 4.6 indicated that there is no significant difference in the extent to which technical skill acquisition enhances the employability potential of undergraduates among the tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State. This finding is in agreement with the study conducted by Oboreh and Nnebe (2019), which revealed that technical innovation has a significant positive influence on the skills acquisition of graduates in Nigerian public universities. This result buttresses the present result, which revealed that the respondents from the different institutions agreed that technical skill acquisition strongly enhances the employability potential of undergraduates in Bayelsa State-owned tertiary institutions.

CONCLUSION

The study investigated the influence of business education students' entrepreneurship skills acquisition on the employability potential of undergraduates in Bayelsa State. The analysis of the data gave results from which the objectives of the study were accomplished. However, the results of the research questions revealed, among others, that technical skill acquisition strongly enhances the employability potential of undergraduates in Bayelsa State-owned tertiary institutions and that financial skill acquisition strongly enhances the employability potential of undergraduates in Bayelsa State-owned tertiary institutions. While the corresponding hypotheses showed that there is no significant difference in the extent to which technical skill acquisition enhances the employability potential of undergraduates among the tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State, there is no significant difference in the extent to which financial skill acquisition enhances the employability potential of undergraduates among the tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State.

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that the acquisition of entrepreneurship skills like technical skill, financial skill, human skill, conceptual skill, and business management skills, enable the employability of undergraduates in Bayelsa State-owned tertiary institutions, and enables students in the tertiary institutions of Bayelsa State to acquire better job prospects. By the result of this study, it becomes imperative that the educational system be remodeled to provide appropriate and well-rounded learning of business education programmes in tertiary institutions

that enhance their employability skills to enable not only students but graduates from such institutions to be more employable in an increasingly competitive job market.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the findings, discussion and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Curriculum developers for the business education program should set up a joint curriculum of entrepreneurial and technical skills and training that will aid undergraduates in formulating a sustainable business plan, enhance confidence, expand technical skill development, and equip them with adequate skills to thrive in the workplace.
2. The management of Bayelsa State's tertiary institutions should strive to groom business education undergraduates who will become good financial managers in their future careers by improving their ability to make strategic decisions that will increase their competitiveness and make the best use of available resources in any organisation in which they find themselves.
3. Business educators should simplify business education instruction in terms of its practicality to create more employability-oriented graduates who will not only develop human management skills but will also be well-positioned to compete for high-paying jobs.
4. Business educators should align with entrepreneurial centres in tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State to bridge the gap created by the prospects of discrepancy in conceptual skills and inventiveness among business education graduates so that students can become proficient in those skills to enhance their employability potential.
5. The management of tertiary institutions in Bayelsa State should emphasize more on the acquisition of business innovation, as creativity and innovativeness are imperative in today's world if one is to gain an advantage in the labour market and improve one's employability potential.

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