
Employability Skills required by Business Education Graduates for Effective Administration of Modern Offices in Enugu State

by

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Abstract

This study determined the employability skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern offices in Enugu State. Two research questions guided the study. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population for the study was 260, made up of 140 postgraduate students from Department of Business Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and 120 postgraduate students from Department of Business Education, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu. The instrument used for data collection was structured questionnaire designed by the researchers. The questionnaire was validated by three experts while the internal consistency of the questionnaire items was ascertained through Cronbach Alpha technique which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.89. The questionnaire was administered personally by the researchers. A total of 260 copies of questionnaire were administered and 255 copies were retrieved given a return rate of (98%), analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The study found that the ability to identify, recognize and define problem and critically analyse situation before taking decision were decision making skills required, the ability to analyze a problem and find its causes were required, ability to set realistic and attainable goals and learning new task in order to solve a problem were problem solving skills required by business education graduates among others. The researchers recommended that on-the-job training opportunities should be provided to the students by the institutions. This is to ensure that relevant industries and institutions collaborate to enable students learn actual task required in the work place. The researchers recommended also that the government through education policy should ensure that the curriculum planners include in academic programmes of business education such courses that would enable undergraduates acquire skills in decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, and management before graduation.

Keywords: Business Education, Office, Modern office, Administration and Employability skills

Introduction

Business education graduates have been exposed to fundamental principles and theories of teaching and learning. Business education is one of the occupational areas that is richly provided by vocational and technical education in Nigeria. Business education is a programme of instruction that offers various skills in accounting, marketing and Office Technology and Management (OTM). Edokpolor and Egbri (2017) stipulated that the actual goals of business education is to prepare students for specific career in office occupations; equip students with the requisite skills for job creation and entrepreneurship and expose students with

knowledge about business, including a good blend of computer technology, which incorporates Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Business education provides students with the necessary skills for self and paid employment. The skills acquired by the graduates of business education enable them to be employable in teaching, industries, as well as qualify them to be self-employed.

Business education graduates in this study are those who have completed their courses of study in business education and have obtained a bachelor's degree in business education from the university or other tertiary institutions that run business education

programme. Business education graduates are expected to work in an office as secretaries, administrative officers or managers.

Office is described as the nerve center of any organization. Sumathy, Malini and Salai (2019) stated that the present day office activities have expanded to a wider extent to keep pace with rapid globalization. According to the authors, an office by itself has become an indispensable part of any business organization. It is a place for transacting business where clerical and administrative functions are carried out to coordinate and control the activities of the organization. A typical office performs tasks such as framing of business policies, processing and communicating of information, record keeping both paper work and soft, handling mails, execution of orders and managing receipts and payments. The Office according to the authors can be described as any place where information converges on paper, which is documented, preserved and used for both current and future operations of business. Arkupal (2012) described an office as a place where clerical work is performed and where all kinds of soft and paper work is maintained and dealt with. Office is regarded as an engine house and important part of an organization. Whether it is a Government institution, a business organization or an educational institution, office plays a very important role. Technological innovation is gradually phasing out traditional office and introducing a modern office. Ahmed (2019) stated that modern offices are organized on scientific principles and their management and administration are in the hands of techno-savvy office managers which has paved way for the sustenance of a business amidst cut-throat competition. The modern office uses technology to make its employees' day-to-day processes easier and can improve their efficiency and increase employee morale. The technology is not limited to state-of-the-art computers. Software and mobile applications make up a big part of the modern office. Using software to mine competitive and industry data can help businesses to learn about the market and increase its share. The modern office answers the question of whether flexible work spaces can help productivity. For many companies, rows of cubicles or desks are no longer common. Instead,

many modern offices offer varied work spaces so that employees can move around from their desks and find a spot that meets the needs of their current task.

Modern offices, according to Sumathy et al (2019), have the advantage of having open-concept seating where employees can have a clear view of all of their teammates from their desks. When someone needs to have a meeting or a private conversation, many offices offer small meeting rooms. In addition, the modern office often boasts comfortable couches required when colleagues need to converse and collaborate in an informal setting. For people who require a space where they can really be serious about the task given them and focus, many modern offices have quiet rooms designed for one or two people to work. Some modern offices offer standing desks in addition to the more traditional ones. In any case, the goal is to provide employees with a variety of work spaces other than their desk. Modern office, according to Arkupal (2012), is regarded as the store house of information. Ahmed (2019) opined that modern office acts as an information center, rather than a data bank for a business organization and also acts as an intermediary agency as it connects different departments with outsiders. It establishes linkages between the business organization and its suppliers, customers, government and the general public as a whole. Today's business modern offices provide varied support services ranging from word processing of reports, letter, and many other documents, to provision of specialized services. The author stated that modern office would offer workers a follow up with the trend of development and enhance their productivity and efficiency. The demand for effective office administration is on a high increase in today's business. This is because of the sensitivity and functionality of an office. For any meaningful success to be recorded in a business there must be an effective and efficient office administration.

Administration, according to Machado (2019), is a process of running an organization, office or business. This includes making rules & regulations, making decisions, management of operations, organizing the staff/employees/people to direct activities

towards achieving a common goal or objective. The approach in achieving the goal of business and taking decision is never static. In the dynamic world of industry and business, office 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. The business of the office can only be productive if the staff is empowered by the modern skills required by the modern office.

Skill, according to Business Dictionary (2019), is the ability and capacity acquired through deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to smoothly and adaptively carryout complex activities or job functions involving ideas (cognitive skills), things (technical skills), and/or people (interpersonal skills). It is that practice, ability or proficiency displayed in the performance of a task. Skill is also the ability to use one's knowledge effectively and readily in performing an act, or habit in doing a particular thing completely without much supervision. Foster (2013), defined skill as the art of possessing the ability, power, authority, or competency to do the task required of an individual on the job. It involves the acquisition of performance capabilities through repetitive performance of an operation.

Skill acquisition is a key, which opens all doors. 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. The types of skills required of business education graduates are introductory and improvement skills, application and integration skill; the other skills being the job specific and vocational skills. All these skills mentioned are important to an individual's career progression and employability.

For one to be employed, one needs to acquire employability skills. Employability

skills, according to Imeokparia & Edigbonya (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. Employability skills are those general skills and knowledge needed by persons, to effectively obtain, retain and progress in an employment. In this study, employability skill is referred to as the ability, power, authority, or competency an individual possess that can make him fit and be efficient in a given employment. Thus, for a business education graduate to be employable in this technology driven age, and also be retained in the employment, such an individual must be equipped with employability skills in addition to the technical skills he/she has acquired through the courses he/she learnt. Such skills increase the individual's employment opportunities in a given discipline. For effective management of modern office, employers are looking for a specific set of employability skills like decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, office administration and self-management skills from the employees.

Decision making skills refer to the ability of an individual to accurately recognize and define problems and opportunities and then to select an appropriate course of action to solve problems and capitalize on opportunities. Valchev (2019) stated that decision making skills are the abilities that people possess and use to select a choice from available options. People always try to make good and effective decisions and use all their knowledge and skills to pass the decision-making process in the right way. Zimmerman and Kanter (2012), observed that the reason why many businesses fail is because in many situations, people with authority to decide, lack the decision making skills, thus, resources are dispersed or wasted. The authors added that in some cases, key figures in management may have conflicting or frustrating vague goals which are direct result of their deficiency in the area of decision and appropriate goal setting. According to the authors, good decision making can avert tragedy but poor decision making or the absence of decisions can result in mismanagement or peril of an organization. Poor decisions in the early stages of an event

can make the organization's job more difficult and more dangerous. In addition, such can give rise to much more critical or complex decisions later. Decision making is a mechanism for making choices at each step of the goal setting or problem-solving process. Some examples of decision making skill include: problem Identifying skill (recognize/define), information gathering skill (facts/assumptions), efficient skill to develop courses of action (solutions), analyze and compare courses of action skill (alternatives/solutions). Decision making is part of problem solving, and decision making occurs at every step of the problem-solving process.

Problem solving is ability to define a problem, generate alternatives, evaluate and select the alternatives and implement solutions to them. According to Imeokparia & Edigbonya (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, one'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 the organization. Good problem solving and decision making ability can avert tragedy and help the organization recover from the event more quickly. A well skilled and equipped Business Education graduate should in addition be creative so as to be employable in this technological era.

Creative thinking is generally defined as intelligent, goal-directed attempts at finding novel solutions to more or less well-defined problems within a specified product or event. According to Stevens (2000), training in the creative thinking process provides cognitive, imaginative, interpersonal and intrapersonal skills that can facilitate productivity, invention and creativity in any field. The author noted that given the massive and ever increasing amounts of information available through technology, it is quickly becoming clear that the ability to creatively synthesize data of information and the ability to use the pieces of information in a way conducive to a larger goal would be crucial

for future success in any business. De Bono (2006), expressed that the future of any nation rests in the hands of those in school today, and the societies success will depend upon not only on their accumulation of technical expertise in a given field, but also on their capacity for creative thinking. The author maintained that to remain and be effective in a modern office takes real innovation and creativity at all levels of the organization. According to Ahmed (2019), this is the age of creativity because the subtext of global competition is increasingly about a nation's ability to mobilize its ideas, talents, and creative organizations. Ahmed noted that any modern office that ignores the global creativity map is spurning an important set of strategic considerations. Imeokparia & Edigbonya (2019) asserts that institutions of learning should equip the would-be managers, administrators of organizations with basic business survival of office administrative skill.

Another important employability skill required by a business education graduate is office administrative skill. Machado (2019) noted that students need to be trained to be effective team members as employers often find that graduates lack good office administrative skills. The ability to work with others and communicate ideas in both verbal and written format is critical to the future employee. Business education graduate is expected to possess office administrative skill as prospectus office manager. Janos (2013) opined that an office manager is likened to an office administrator and as such is expected to get the job done. The author posits that for an office manager or administrator to do so, he or she must learn to plan, analyze situations and set realistic and attainable goals for the organization. The author asserts that office administrator must be able to reason under the most critical conditions and decide quickly what action to take. If they delay or avoid making a decision, this indecisiveness may create hesitancy, loss of confidence, and confusion within the organization, and may cause the task to fail. Since office managers or administrators are frequently faced with unexpected circumstances, it is important that business education institutions should equip the students with office administrative skills that would help

them secure and sustain job in industries and other areas in the country. It would also make them to be mobile in terms of choosing job. The author suggested that institutions of learning should in addition to technical skills inculcate learners the job needed self-management skills that would enable them to be employable and effective in modern office.

Self-management is an aspect of administration. According to Esuh and Minnia, (2014) is an emerging aspect of entrepreneurship management that has not received much attention. For effective administration of a modern office, self-management skill is very necessary. Self-management skill is that type of skill that would assist entrepreneurs to become more successful and effective entrepreneurs even in a modern office. Self-management skills include skill to know oneself, personal time management skill, activities/day planning skill, and unnecessary activities (Ahmed 2019). For this to be actualized, government and institutions must ensure that national policy in education directs curriculum planners to include such employability skills in undergraduate programmes of business education students. All these skills are vital for a successful business operation in any modern office.

Modern office has created challenges to office administrators especially in this technology driven era. Arkupal (2012) noted that no business can run successfully without a well-organized and efficiently managed office. Efficiency is generated only if the trained staffs are equipped with the right skills that will make them resourceful and productive. Rohaizat, Ebi and Zubaidah (2016) shared the same view when they postulated that the need for accelerated performance levels in businesses have induced a corresponding need for rapid change in the skills required of university (business education) graduates. The authors maintained that this changing environment with resultant organizational restructuring means graduates now find jobs more demanding as businesses become more competitive. According to the authors, in the past, managerial competence went hand in hand with specific skills and abilities, today however, it involves much more. It is expected therefore

that business education graduates should in addition to the technical skills they possess, add other soft skills without which it might be very difficult for them to compete well in the labor market. The author noted that, there are few people who would undertake to train for the acquisition of these skills and practice them. Obviously, no single research work has captured all the employability skills mentioned above.

Statement of the Problem

The level of success in any business is a function of the skills possessed by the business workers. Modern office management is becoming complex on daily basis because of technological innovations. Variety of occupational problems and decisions confront every individual in an office today. The problems are primarily due to the increasingly complex nature of the world of work. Janos (2013) 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 modern office. It is clear that lack of employability and modern office skills such as creativity, problem solving and many others affect the employability and performance of some graduates. It is salient to note that without some of these skills such as creativity there would be no innovation and this should lead to stagnation and inadequate productivity in any organization. Though some studies might have been conducted on employability but none was carried out to determine in a broad form the employability skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern office. Therefore, there was need of this study to fill the gap.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to determine the employability skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern offices in Enugu

State. Specifically, this study sought to determine:

- 1) Decision making skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern offices in Enugu state.
- 2) Problem solving skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern offices in Enugu State.
- 3) Creative thinking skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern offices in Enugu State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the decisions making skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern offices in Enugu State?
2. What are the problems solving skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern offices in Enugu State?
3. What are the creative thinking skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern offices in Enugu State?

Methodology

The study adopted descriptive survey research design to identify the decision making skills; problems solving skills; and creative thinking skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern offices in Enugu State. The study was conducted in the Departments of Business Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Enugu State University of Science and Technology. Department of Business Education was chosen from the two universities because the Departments have the largest enrolment of postgraduate students in the Universities in the South East Nigeria (NUC, 2018 Record). The population for the study was 260, made up of 140 randomly selected postgraduate students in the Department of Business Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and 120 also randomly selected postgraduate students in the

Department of Business Education, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu.

The instrument used for data collection for the study was structured questionnaire. The structured questionnaire titled 'Employability Skills Required by Business Education Graduates for Effective Administration of Modern Offices (ESRBEGEAMO)' – was developed by the researchers from literature reviewed. The instrument was divided into Part I and Part II. Part I was on general information about the respondents. Part II was further divided into sections A, B, and C. Section A had 6-item statements that sought information on the decision making skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern offices. Section B had 6-item statements that sought information on the problem solving skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern offices. Section C contained 8-item statements that sought information on the creative thinking skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern offices. The response categories for the three sections was a 5-point rating scale which ranged from 5– 1 (Very Much Required = 5, Required = 4, somewhat Required = 3, Seldom Required = 2, Not Required = 1).

The questionnaire was validated by two lecturers from Department of Business Education University of Nigeria, Nsukka and one lecturer from Department of Business Education, Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu; while the internal consistency of the questionnaire items was ascertained through Cronbach Alpha technique which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.89. The questionnaire was administered to the respondents by the researchers. The researchers took time to explain to the respondents areas and terms they find difficult to understand to ensure their objective responses to the questionnaire items. Two hundred and sixty copies were administered and two hundred and fifty five copies were retrieved and used for study. The research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation. The data were analyzed using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Mean scores of 2.50 – 3.49 and above

were regarded as required (R) while mean (NR).
scores below 2.50 were regarded as not required

Results

Table 1: Mean Responses of Respondents on the Decision Making Skills Required by Business Education Graduates for Effective Administration of Modern Offices

S/NO	Items	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1	Ability to gather information and develop courses of action during decision making process	4.57	0.63	Required
2	Ability to deliberate with colleagues and select the best course of action for effective decision making.	4.43	0.73	Required
3	Patience is required in taking effective decision in the modern offices.	3.93	0.99	Required
4	Ability to identify, recognize and define the problem at hand.	4.52	0.73	Required
5	Ability to analyze and compare courses of action (alternatives/solutions).	4.29	0.83	Required
6	Ability to critically analyze situations before taking decision in the office.	4.700	0.69	Required
	Grand mean/deviation	4.40	0.77	Required

In Table 1, the grand mean score was 4.40 and this implied that the respondents agreed that the six item statements were decision making skills required by business education graduates for effective administration in modern offices. The grand standard deviation is 0.77 and it implied that the opinions of the respondents were close to each other.

Table 2: Mean Responses of Respondents on the Problem Solving Skills Required by Business Education Graduates for Effective Administration of Modern Offices

S/NO	Items	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1	Ability to recognize a problem	4.42	0.80	Required
2	Ability to analyze a problem and find its causes.	4.39	0.79	Required
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	Required
4	Learning new task in order to solve a problem	4.48	0.67	Required
5	Ability to set realistic and attainable goals in office in order to get task done.	4.43	0.66	Required
6	Identifying and solving skill in modern office practice.	4.05	0.85	Required
	Grand mean/deviation	4.39	0.75	Required

In Table 2, the grand mean score was 4.39 and this implied that the respondents accepted that the six item statements were problem solving skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern offices. The grand standard deviation is 0.75 and it implied that the range in the responses of respondents was not far from the mean.

Table 3: Mean Responses of Respondents on the Creative Thinking Skills Required by Business Education Graduates for Effective Administration of Modern Offices

S/NO	ITEMS	X	SD	Remarks
1	Ability to be innovative and creative.	4.33	0.84	Required
2	Skill to think out solutions outside the normal reasoning ways.	4.48	0.72	Required
3	Being focused until result is obtained.	4.67	0.57	Required
4	Ability to Plan ahead of time.	4.38	0.84	Required
5	Being able to Prepare adequately as well as being fluency, i.e. ability to produce many ideas.	4.29	0.82	Required
6	Ability to exhibit originality – uniqueness, novelty, newness, creativities (new) or innovativeness (improvement of existing)	4.18	0.66	Required
7	Ability to respect other people's view	4.52	0.67	Required
8	Ability to cooperate with others and work as a team.	4.33	0.84	Required
Grand mean/deviation		4.40	0.74	Required

The grand mean score of all the items in Table 3 was 4.40 and was within the boundary limit of 2.50 – 5.00. This implies that the item statements were creative thinking skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern offices. The grand standard deviation of items 1 – 8 in table 3 was 0.74. This implies that the opinions of respondents were close to each other.

Discussion of the Findings

The study revealed that the grand mean score of 4.40 is an indication that ability to gather information and develop courses of action during decision making process; ability to identify, recognize and define the problem at hand and ability to critically analyze situations before taking decision in an office were decision making skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern offices. 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.

The study revealed that ability to learn new task in order to solve a problem, ability to analyze a problem and find its causes and ability to act as an intermediary between colleagues and management in issues that concern modern office administration were

problem solving skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern offices. 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. This study revealed that ability to be innovative and creative, ability to respect other people's view and ability to cooperate with others and work as team were creative thinking skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern offices. This finding agreed with the statement of De Bono (2006) that the societies success would depend upon not only on their accumulation of technical expertise in a given field, but also on their capacity for creative thinking.

Conclusion

The study sought to determine employability skills required by business education graduates for effective administration of modern offices using survey research. The conclusion from this survey provides empirical and relevant input for practical approaches and participation in real world of work in modern offices. Graduates entering the real world of work especially in modern offices should be able to gather information and develop courses of action during decision making process, analyze a problem and find its causes, be

innovative and creative, invest time wisely and be punctual to work. The business education graduates are required to manage human and material resources well before fitting into modern offices.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings, discussions and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Special programmes should be designed by institutions of learning to groom students on some of the employability skills revealed in this study as some of them may not be acquired from the class room setting only.
2. 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.
3. 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.
4. Government through policy in education should ensure that the curriculum planners incorporate courses in these skilled areas in academic programmes of business education undergraduates which would help them to be better equipped in decision making, problem solving, creative thinking, and self-management skills on graduation.

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