

# Employer's Rating of Skills Needed by Business Education Graduates For Employability in Enugu State

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## Abstract

The employability of Business Education graduates for sustainable development has remained a serious issue in Nigeria as the youth unemployment rate keeps increasing and government efforts at addressing it are not yielding results. This paper reports employers' rating of the skills needed by Business Education graduates for employability in Enugu State. The descriptive survey design was used for the study. The population comprised all the employers of labour in Enugu State, with 40 employers purposely sampled from the 17 local government areas (LGAs) in the state. A validated research questionnaire was used to collect data. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument, which yielded an index value of 0.77. The data collected were analyzed using mean score and t-test statistic at 0.05 confidence limit. All the generic skills identified in the study were rated by the employers as highly needed by Business Education graduates for employability. The most highly rated skill was effective planning and resourcefulness and the least rated by the employers but highly needed was problem-solving. Also,

there was no significant difference in the rating of the skills needed for employability of Business Education graduates based on the years of business experience of the employers. Thus, collaboration is imperative between the management of higher educational institutions and employers of labour in the areas of information and training on the skills needed by Business Education graduates for employability. Also, employers of labour are expected to provide educational institutions with information regarding these skills, based on environmental and technological changes in business.

**Keywords:** Employers, Skills, Business education graduates, Employability

## **Introduction**

### **Background of the study**

Quality education has been described as the key to all forms of development and the greatest facilitator of change. Little wonder that it is one of the first group of sustainable development goals. It has been proven to be the most powerful vehicle for bringing about changes in other facets of human existence and crucial in attaining the future. Education enables people to realize their potentials and improve their quality of life. However, in the provision of education, key skills, values and attitudes for employability and sustainability are crucial.

In recent years, graduate unemployment has become a serious issue in Nigeria and Business Education graduates are no exception. It is no longer unusual to see graduates walking the streets of Nigeria's cities searching for non-existing job opportunities. Thousands of these graduates turned out from tertiary institutions every year end up roaming the streets without any hope of securing jobs or self-employment. The issue of unemployment in Nigeria has been attributed to many factors, the most important of which is inadequate saleable skills among graduates (Okoli & Ezenwafor, 2015). Emeh, Nwanguma and Abaroh (2012) also cited dearth of candidates with employable skills as the main reason for unemployment among university graduates rather than unavailability of jobs.

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Employability depicts qualities that a person possesses which make him/her employable at job entry level and able to maintain the job subsequently. The Australian Council for Educational Research (2000) noted such qualities as resourcefulness, adaptability and flexibility, which are needed for success at work and in life as a whole. The employability of a person depends on the knowledge, skills, abilities and attitudes possessed and the way such competencies are applied in line with the needs of the labour market. These competencies are needed by both employers and employees for effective performance in the world of work. However, the employers are on the demand side of labour and are the key stakeholders who identify the skills which people need to obtain, develop and maintain their jobs in the labour market. These employers of labour are also expected to make these skills known to educational institutions and other trainers and assist them to ensure that those skills are acquired by their trainees.

Skills encompass the abilities, capabilities, aptitude and expertise, acquired through deliberate, systematic and sustained training, and necessary to adaptively perform job functions effectively. Employability skills are the transferable skills that an individual needs to make him employable and able to maintain a job. These skills are regarded as generic because they are readily transferable across different work settings. The fast growth in the knowledge-driven economy with increasing globalization of economic activities and technological changes has increased the demand for new additional competencies from individuals for employment. Job specific, technical skills are no longer enough as one needs to exhibit the generic skills to make him perform effectively in any job condition that requires the transfer of knowledge.

Business Education, which is education for and about business is designed to produce qualified and competent graduates who should become successful workers and employers of labour. Consequently, the provision of the generic employability skills to Business Education undergraduates in addition to their occupation knowledge becomes very essential. Such generic skills are categorized as core basic skills, intellectual abilities and personal attributes. These are the same skills required for a graduate to start and effectively run and manage his or her own business.

Unfortunately, Business Education as a programme is facing the great challenge of reinventing itself in response to a number of factors that

are affecting the quality of its graduates. The performance level of these business graduates seems to be poor. Some business owners and managers consider the products of tertiary institutions in Nigeria unusable without further training due to lack of adequate practical experience (FRN, 2004). According to Ibang (2015), some of the causative factors identified are: illegal admission concessions, poor quality of students that matriculate and lack of dedication among lecturers. Ibang further outlined other causes as the waiver clause, which allows failed students to graduate; brain-drain syndrome; run down infrastructure; poor funding; erosion of university autonomy and political interference in university administration. It is also evident that education in Nigeria is not getting the best of attention. According to Oyaziwo (2009), the Nigerian government's investment in education is abysmally low when compared with UNESCO's benchmark for governments of developing nations, which is at least 26 percent of the annual budget.

Business Education as an occupational area of study needs adequate modern facilities for practicals and a learning environment equipped with technologies found in modern offices and business organizations. Unfortunately, these facilities are not provided and students are unable to learn with them to acquire the necessary skills required for employment. Consequently, unemployment has become a major problem bedeviling the lives of Nigerians, especially among the youth, who are willing, able and allowed by law to work but are unable to find jobs.

According to Nwankwo and Ifejiolor (2014), graduate unemployment in Nigeria has affected the youth and the economic development of the country from socio-economic perspectives. Graduate unemployment constitutes a great problem to Nigeria's development in several ways, causing frustration and dejection among the youth, thereby contributing to high rate of poverty and insecurity in the country. Okoli and Ezenwafor (2015) observed, however, that some of the unemployed persons do not have saleable skills to enable them get paid jobs or establish their own enterprises.

The changing trend in labour market profiles has equally increased the complexity of skills required by today's workforce and threatened the position of graduates that are ill-equipped with knowledge of modern technology. Imeokparia and Ediagbonya (2012) also discovered that the

quality and focus of training offered by the universities are not in line with the needs of the society and employers, which has contributed to the high unemployment rate in the country. This study is of the opinion that many graduates are trained with skills that are not directly relevant to the needs of the labour market. It is important that the learning experiences provided in our higher educational institutions capture and represent the needs and priorities of today's employers of labour. Against this backdrop, it becomes imperative that the opinion of employers on the extent of skills required by Business Education graduates for employment and sustainability of their jobs be established. This is with a view to passing these suggestions to trainers in educational institutions where found wanting, and thereby curb unemployment among the youth in the society.

### **Theoretical Underpinning**

This study is strengthened and embedded in the conflict theory of Karl Marx. Karl Marx noted that the society is characterized by inequalities in social status, wealth and power, which create conflict between individuals, economic, political and social groups. This theoretical paradigm as it relates to employability x-rays the conflict between employers and the academia, emphasizing the fact that different groups, namely employers, academia, and employees have varying access to power and opportunities (Brown et al., 2003). In the employer-academia conflict, the employers feel that the academia have not been equipping graduates with adequate generic skills and this is crucial to the survival of organizations.

Academic institutions are often blamed by employers for the failure of graduates to meet employers' expectations in the labour market. In most cases, the employers argue that it is the sole prerogative of higher education institutions to provide undergraduates with employability skills during their preparation to make them ready for use after graduation. They also expect that higher educational institutions should be responsive to the overwhelming challenges of the demands of the workplace environment and technology, and constantly review their curriculum to meet such challenges.

However, the conflict theory of employers and the academia is of the view that the provision of employability skills is not the duty of the academia alone and that employers should also assume the responsibility

for providing workplace experiences that will increase the employability of graduates.

The implication of this theory as it relates to this study is that stakeholders in education, including employers, should not see the provision of generic skills as the responsibility of the academia alone. There is need to constantly adjust job training to environmental and technological changes in the society. The employers' opinions should also be considered paramount in the provision of information in terms of the gap in skills possessed by the graduates, and all stakeholders should take responsibility for overcoming the gap by providing the skills lacking and to the levels demanded. The employers are equally expected to provide training to business education undergraduates with facilities in the workplace where the students are expected to work after graduation, as these facilities may not be available in the institutions. This also includes the provision of generic skills that are needed for employability and sustainability of jobs after employment.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to ascertain the perception of employers of labour on the extent of generic skills required by Business Education graduates for employability in Enugu State.

### **Research Questions**

One question guided the study:

1. What is the perception of employers of labour on the generic skills needed for Business Education graduates' employability in Enugu State?

### **Hypothesis**

One hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance

There is no significant difference in the mean rating of employers regarding skills required by Business Education graduates for employability in Enugu State based on years of business experience.

### **Methodology**

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The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The population comprised all employers of labour in Enugu State while 40 employers of labour were purposively sampled from the seventeen (17) Local Government Areas (LGAs) in the state. A validated structured questionnaire was used to collect data. Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to determine the internal consistency of the instrument, which yielded an index value of 0.77. The data collected were analyzed using mean score and t-test statistic.

The research questionnaire consists of ten (10) items on a five rating scale. The response categories are: Very Highly Needed (VHN), Highly Needed (HN), Moderately Needed (MN), Lowly Needed (LN) and Very Lowly Needed (VLN). Forty (40) copies of the questionnaire were distributed with 100 percent retrieval rate. All the retrieved questionnaires were also found usable.

Weighted mean was used to determine the employers' agreement on the extent of skills needed by the Business Education graduates for employability. They are as follows:

Very Highly Needed	-	4.50 - 5.00
Highly Needed	-	3.50 - 4.49
Moderately Needed	-	2.50 - 3.49
Lowly Needed	-	1.50 - 2.49
Very Lowly Extent	-	1.00 - 1.49

The t-test statistic was used to test the null hypothesis raised at 0.05 level of significance. The hypothesis would be rejected where the t-calculated value is greater than t-critical value at 0.05 level of significance, if not the hypothesis would be accepted.

### **Results**

The results of the study are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

*Research Question:* What is the perception of employers of labour on the generic skills needed for Business Education graduates' employability in Enugu State?

**Table 1: Respondents' mean rating and standard deviation on the generic skills needed for Business Education graduates' employability**

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remarks
1.	Skills for effective planning and resourcefulness	4.19	1.26	Highly needed
2.	Skills for good interaction and interpersonal relation	3.99	1.20	Highly needed
3.	Skills for internet and internet connectivity services	4.12	1.24	Highly needed
4.	Effective communication skills	4.11	1.24	Highly needed
5.	Skills for retrieval and handling fo information	4.00	1.21	Highly needed
6.	Initiative skills for goo decision making	4.18	1.26	Highly needed
7.	Work ethics skills	4.11	1.24	Highly needed
8.	Problem solving skills	3.53	1.06	Highly needed
9.	Skill for sel-confidence and adaptability	4.10	1.20	Highly needed
10.	Numerical skills for good computation	4.10	1.21	Highly needed
	Cluster Mean	4.02		Highly needed

Data contained in Table 1 shows that all 10 items were rated by the employers as highly needed by Business Education graduates for employability in the labour market. This was also confirmed by the cluster mean of 4.02. The standard deviation values show homogeneity in their opinions.

### **Hypothesis**

There is no significant difference in the mean rating of employers regarding skills required by Business Education graduates for employability in Enugu State based on years of business experience.

**Table 2: t-test analysis of differences in the mean rating of employers regarding skills required by business education graduates for employability in Enugu State based on years of business experience**

S/N	Group	Mean	SD	N	DF	A-level	t-cal	t-critical	Decision
1	0-5 years	4.16	1.16	25	103	0.05	1.06	1.96	Not sign
2	Below 5 years	4.2	1.89	15					

Data contained in Table 2 indicates that the t-calculated value of 1.06 is less than the t-critical value of 1.96. This implies that there is no significant difference between the perceptions of respondents on Business Education graduates' employability in Enugu State. The hypothesis is therefore not rejected.

### **Discussion of Findings and Implications of the Study**

The findings of this study revealed that the employers of labour considered all the items rated on generic skills as highly needed by Business Education graduates for employability. This is further confirmed by the cluster mean of 4.02. These generic skills are as follows: Skills for effective planning and resourcefulness, initiative skill for good decision making and skill for Internet and Internet connectivity services. Equally rated are the skills for effective communication and work ethics; self-confidence and adaptability, and numerical skills for good computation. Others are skills for retrieval and handling of information, interaction and interpersonal relationship, and lastly, problem-solving skills.

The findings are consistent with those posted by Abdullah, Kamal and Muna (2014), whose findings revealed that employers attach high importance to work ethics, resourcefulness, initiative, computing skills, numerical skills, analytical skills, self-confidence and adaptability. It is also noteworthy that the ratings of the employers regarding the extent of skills needed show how much they value the possession of those skills by the graduates for effective job performance and growth of their organizations. The skill for planning and resourcefulness was the most highly rated, as the success of any business starts from planning, which is setting of objectives and planning strategies to achieve them. One's ability to achieve these depicts resourcefulness, as human and material resources need to be effectively and efficiently coordinated. The planning and resourcefulness

skill is transferable and needed for the survival of all businesses (Okoli, 2008).

Although the problem-solving skill was the least rated, it is highly needed for employability. Our society and businesses are dynamic with problems constantly arising from environmental and technological changes. Employers need graduates that have the initiative to take good and timely decisions, communicate effectively, are adept at using Internet facilities and cope with changes to solve these problems and remain in business. Numeracy, analytical and computation skills were also considered as highly needed basically for business computations in order to differentiate between profit and loss in business (Okoli, 2008). These generic skills enable the Business Education graduate to fit into any business situation, make positive impact in his place of employment, sustain the existence of the business by his effective job performance and stand the chance of being retained in the job.

The study also discovered that there is no significant difference in the perception of the employers regarding skills required by business education graduates for employability in Enugu State based on years of business experience (below 5 years, and 5 years and above).

The findings of this study have implications for employers of labour; they could be enabled to create networks for effective collaborations with higher education institutions, for the purpose of providing information on the levels of skills needed by Business Education graduates for employability. This should be in line with the environmental and technological demands of businesses. This could serve as training assistance to the institutions to instill the generic skills needed among Business Education graduates for employability.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study it was concluded that all the generic skills identified are highly needed by Business Education graduates for employability. These include: skills for effective planning and resourcefulness, initiative skills for good decision making, skills for use of the Internet and Internet connectivity services, skills for effective communication, and work ethics skill. Others are skills for self-confidence and adaptability, numerical skills for good computation, skills for retrieval

and handling of information, interaction and interpersonal relationship and problem-solving skills. There was no significant difference in the opinions of the employers regarding the extent of these skills needed by Business Education graduates for employability based on years of business experience.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. There should be collaboration between the management of higher educational institutions and employers of labour in the areas of information and training on the skills needed by Business Education graduates for employability. The employers of labour should always provide educational institutions with information regarding these skills based on environmental and technological changes in business.
2. The internship programmes for Business Education undergraduates should be strengthened, with employers of labour getting more involved with the provision of job practical experiences and not seeing the training as the sole responsibility of the educational institutions.
3. Efforts should be made to review the Business Education curriculum in tertiary institutions, in order to adequately reflect the requisite learning experiences proposed by employers.
4. Governments at federal, state and local levels should make use of research findings from the academia and institute a good database with departments in charge of providing information to educational institutions and the general public on the skills needed by business graduates for employability.

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