The Level of Foundational Skills Application Among Graduate Employees in Edo and Delta States, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study aimed to assess the level of foundational skills of graduate employees in Edo and Delta States using Business Education) graduates as a case study. Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. Adescriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population was 1,016 supervisors with a sample size of 309 determined by using the proportionate stratified sampling technique. A structuredquestionnaire was used to collect data. Reliability of the instrument was determined by using Cronbach Alpha reliability method and an overall reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained. Data relating to the research questions wereanalyzed using arithmetic mean and standard deviations. The t-test was used to test null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed that the supervisors rated application of all the aspects of foundational skills by Business Education graduates to be moderately applied. From the findings, it was concluded that the level of application of foundational skills by Business Education graduates is inadequate to meet the demands of employers. Hence, the training received by graduates is insufficient to meet the challenges of the modern-day office and thereby inferring that graduates from other disciplines do not have the necessary training to meet with the challenges of modern-day office. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommended that the observed deficiencies in literacy and numeracy skills which constitute part of the foundational skills should be adequately addressed by revamping the general studies courses in general studies units in tertiary institutions.

Keywords: Business Education Graduates, Employers of Labour, Foundational Skills, Graduate Employees, Low Level Skills

INTRODUCTION

In the new global economy, employers need more than technical knowledge and skills from workers which are often referred to as job-specific skills. It has been affirmed that in addition to the job-specific skills, workers must apply soft skills to continue contributing to the growth and expansion of an industry or corporation. Buttressing these points, Andrews & Higson (2008) and Conference Board of Canada (2000) stated that several types of research have shown that many employers are interested in essential employability skills of graduates and those who will be able to highly apply their skills in real work situations.The global economy has shifted from its primitive structure to a technologically-driven economy. This ongoing development has made jobs and skills to be changing dramatically and thus encouraging the integration of soft skills into most sheres of life (CICSO, 2008; Partners in Education Transformation, 2010; Oviawe & Lukmon, 2017).There is a disparity and inconsistency of the curriculum in schools to current economic realities (Association of Business Educators of Nigeria, 2003).

Conference Board of Canada (2000); and Petronella & Renee (2015) observed that employers' dissatisfaction with the level of skills and qualities of graduates contributes to the growing graduates' unemployment rate in most parts of the world in recent times. This development is a result of inadequate application of essential employability skills such as English proficiency coupled with a high technological drive of most organizations in response to tougher competition in the competitive markets. In the report of the forum held in Nigeria by the British council on "bridging employability skill gap in Nigeria", it was revealed that the graduates' unemployment in Nigeria is attributable to lack of foundational skills which encompasses the literacy skills, numeracy skills, and Communication skills. It was added that some graduates do not know how to express themselves in writing especially when looking for employment (Jonck, 2014). Okpiaifo (2016) stated that most people often imply that a bad economy, ineffective government, job scarcity are the causes of unemployment in Nigeria. However, having seen several vacancy adverts around, it would be observed that lack of good communicative skills, inadequate computer literacy skills, and a host of other skills are some of the reasons Nigerian graduates are unemployed. (Hager, Holland, & Beckett, 2002).

According to the Confederation of British Industry (2009), the all-round employability of graduates and the skills they have gained matter more than their degree subject. The United Kingdom Commission for Employment and Skills (2011) found that 81% of employers rate basic skills which are an aspect of employability as one of the most sort-after employability skills when assessing potential candidates.

According to SCANS report (2000), foundational skills which arealso known as basic skills includethe ability to read, write, speak, listen, perform basic mathematical procedures and computer operations. Reading skills include the ability to interpret written information. Writing skills include the ability to communicate thoughts in letters and reports, using Standard English to communicate thoughts, ideas, and information in written form. Numeracy involves an understanding of numerical data, statistics, and the graphs, and is also part of making decisions and reasoning. Computer literacy skills include the ability to communicate to a wider audience using computer and other technological gadgets to process information.

The graduates of the Business Education are expected to be knowledgeable and versatile in communicative skills based on the objectives of the programme and the nature of the job of the Office Technology and Management graduate employees. Business Education professionals are trained employees who should possess a mastery of office skills deal with emergencies, gather facts and present them meaningfully. Considering the sensitive role the Business Education professionals play in the operations and effective running of any organization and because of the skill demands of employers of labour, it will be highly detrimental to the Business Education professionals if they cannot highly apply foundational skills especially in this era of massive unemployment and job insecurity in Nigeria (Dabalen, Oni, & Adekola, 2000). However, because studies on the assessment of the level of application of employability skills by graduate employees have not been explicit on the aspect of the assessment of foundational skills by Business Education graduates, it is therefore pertinent to establish the level Business Education graduate employees could apply foundational skills in the performance of office tasks in public and private institutions in Edo and Delta States.

The purpose of this study was to assess the level application of foundational skills by graduate employees in public and private tertiary institutions in Edo and Delta States from the opinion of their Supervisors. Specifically, the study determined supervisors' ratings of Business Education graduates application of literacy skills, numeracy skills and information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study.

1. How do supervisors rate the level of application of literacy skills by Business Education graduates in tertiary institutions in Edo, and Delta States.
2. How do supervisors rate the level of application of Numeracy skills by Business Education

graduates in tertiary institutions in Edo and Delta States?

3. How do supervisors rate the level of application of ICT skills by Business Education graduates in tertiary institutions in Edo and Delta States?

METHODOLOGY

The survey research design was adopted for this study. The population consisted of 1,016 supervisors from the public and private tertiary institutions in Edo and Delta State with a sample size of 309 determined by using the proportionate stratified sampling technique to select a sample participant in each stratum (No. of executives in each institutions X total no. of executives in each stratum/total population). The instrument which was developed by the researchers was used for data collection was the researcher's structured 20 item questionnaire relating to foundational skills with a five point rating scale. The questionnaire was duly validated by three experts in Business Education department and Measurement and Evaluation department from University of Benin. The Reliability of the instrument was determined by administering the instrument to 20 office supervisors outside the area of study and application of Cronbach alpha yielded an overall reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained.The instrument was distributed by the researcher and four trained research assistants. Data related to the three research questions were analyzed using arithmetic mean and standard deviations. The t-test was used to test null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: How do supervisors rate the level of application of literacy skills by Business Education graduates in tertiary institutions in Edo and Delta States.

The Data in Table 1 reveals that the mean values of the respondents ranged from 3.15 to 3.49. This implies that respondents think that the application of literacy skills is moderately applied by O.T.M graduates.However, the aggregate meanfor all the items onliteracy skills was 3.42, which fell within the boundary/real limit of "moderately applied".

The standard deviation computed showed that the individual responses ranged from 0.73 to 1.07 with an average standard deviation of 0.91 indicating that all items are within the same range. This by implication shows that the respondents are not wide apart in their mean ratings.

Table 1. Respondents' Mean Ratings on the application of Literacy Skills by
Business Education graduates in Edo and Delta States (N = 308)

S/N	Items on Literacy skills	X	S.D	Remarks
1	Express ideas clearly and confidently in speech	3.48	.73	Moderately Applied
2	Express ideas clearly in writing	3.49	.78	Moderately Applied
3	Interpretation of written information	3.74	.87	Moderately Applied
4	Read and comprehend documents ranging from simple and straightforward, to more complex and detailed.	3.18	1.07	Moderately Applied
5	Apply what is learned from written material to work situations	3.15	1.01	Moderately Applied
6	Ability to communicate thoughts in letters and reports, using standard English	3.48	1.00	Moderately Applied
	Aggregate Mean	**3.42**	**.91**	**Moderately Applied**

Research Question 2: How do supervisors rate the level of application of numeracy skills by Business Education graduates in tertiary institutions in Edo and Delta States?

The Data in Table 2 reveals that the mean values of the respondents ranged from 3.10 to 3.48. This implies that respondents think that the application of numeracy skills is moderately applied by Business

Education graduates. .However, the aggregate meanfor all the items onnumeracy skills was 3.22, which fell within the boundary/real limit of "moderately applied".

The standard deviation computed showed that the individual responses ranged from 1.00 to 1.07 with an average standard deviation of 1.03 indicating that all items are within the same range. This by implication shows that the respondents are not wide apart in their mean ratings.

Table 2. Respondents' Mean Ratings on the application of Numeracy Skills by Business Education graduates in Edo and Delta States (N = 308)

S/N	Items on Literacy skills	X	S.D	Remarks
1	Solve simple arithmetic problems	3.10	1.02	Moderately Applied
2	Solve practical problems using a variety of Mathematical techniques	3.18	1.07	Moderately Applied
3	Understands numerical data, statistics	3.15	1.01	Moderately Applied
4	Work with numbers	3.48	1.00	Moderately Applied
	Aggregate Mean	**3.22**	**1.03**	**Moderately Applied**

Research Question 3: How do supervisors rate the level of application of ICT skills by Business Education graduates in tertiary institutions in Edo and Delta States?

The Data in Table 3 reveals that the mean values of the respondents ranged from 3.12 to 3.71. This implies that respondents believe that the application of ICT skills is moderately applied by Business Education graduate employees. However, the aggregate mean for all the items on ICT skills was 3.38, which fell within the boundary/real limit of "moderately applied".

The standard deviation computed showed that the individual responses ranged from 0.83 to 1.20 with an average standard deviation of 1.01 indicating that all items are within the same range. This by implication shows that the respondents are not wide apart in their mean ratings.

Table 3. Respondents' Mean Ratings on the application of ICT skills by Business Education graduates in Edo and Delta States (N = 308)

S/N	Items on Literacy skills	X	S.D	Remarks
1	Use word processing to compose and type correspondences, scientific or technical materials, numerical data, charts and forms	3.71	.83	Moderately Applied
2	Manage database	3.45	.93	Moderately Applied
3	Create spread sheets	3.43	1.05	Moderately Applied
4	Use the internet and email	3.65	1.05	Moderately Applied
5	Design web pages	2.93	1.20	Lowly Applied
6	Disseminate information electronically through telephone and email, fax machine and telex	3.50	1.02	Moderately Applied
7	Use computers to create presentations using projector	3.24	1.13	Moderately Applied
8	Use desktop publishing and digital graphics to design	3.12	1.04	Moderately Applied
9	Enters, retrieves, updates, verifies, and deletes information from electronic files	3.63	.96	Moderately Applied
10	Operate available modern office equipment	3.64	.88	Moderately Applied
	Aggregate mean	**3.38**	**1.01**	**Moderately Applied**

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

Hypothesis 1: Public supervisors and private supervisors do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the application of literacy skills by Business Education graduate employees.

Analysis of data in respect of hypothesis one were analyzed and presented in Table 4. Data in Table 4 shows a probability value of 0.18 which is greater than the stated level of significance of 0.05 indicating acceptance of null hypothesis. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of supervisors in the public tertiary institutions (M = 3.88, SD = 0.68) and supervisors in private tertiary institutions (M = 3.99, SD = 0.63); t =-1.35, p = 0.18. From these results therefore, the hypothesis which stated that supervisors in public and private tertiary institutions do not differ significantly in their mean ratings of Business Education graduates' application of literacy skills was accepted.

Table 4. Summary of t-test for significant difference between of Public and
Private Supervisors' Mean Ratings on the Application of literacy skills by Business Education graduates.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	Sig.	t-test	P-value	Decision
Public Institutions	218	3.88	.68	306	0.05	-1.35	0.18	Accept
Private Institutions	90	3.99	.63					

Hypothesis 2: Public supervisors and private supervisors do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the level of application of numeracy skills by Business Education graduate employees.

Analysis of data in respect of hypothesis one were analyzed and presented in Table 5. Data in Table 5 shows a probability value of .0.17 which is greater than the stated level of significance of 0.05 indicating that there is no significant difference in the scores of supervisors in public tertiary institutions (M = 3.44, SD = 0.69) and supervisors in private tertiary institutions (M = 3.56, SD = 0.72); t =-1.37, p = 0.17. From these results therefore, the hypothesis which stated that supervisors in public and private institutions do not differ significantly in their mean ratings of Business Education graduates' application of numeracy skills was accepted.

Table 5. Summary of t-test for significant difference between of Public and
Private Supervisors' Mean Ratings on the Application of Numeracy Skills by Business Education graduates

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	Sig.	t-test	P-value	Decision
Public Institutions	218	3.44	.69	306	0.05	-1.37	0.17	Accepted
Private Institutions	90	3.56	.72					

Hypothesis 3: Public supervisors and private supervisors do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the level of application of ICT skills by business education graduate employees.

Data in Table 6 shows a probability value of 0.00 which is lesser than the stated level of significance of 0.05 indicating rejection of the null hypothesis. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the scores for supervisors in public tertiary institutions (M = 3.38, SD = 0.60) and supervisors in private tertiary institutions (M = 3.44, SD = 0.69); t =-1.67, p = 0.19. From these results therefore, the hypothesis which stated that supervisors in public and private tertiary institutions do not differ significantly in their mean ratings of Business Education graduates'application of ICT skills was accepted.

Table 6. Summary of t-test for significant difference between of Public and
Private Supervisors' Mean Ratings on the Application of ICT Skills by Business Education graduates.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Df	Sig.	t-test	P-value	Decision
Public Institutions	218	3.44	.60	306	0.05	-1.67	0.17	Accept
Private Institutions	90	3.56	.69					

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The results of the analysis of the data relating to foundational skills revealed thatBusiness Education graduates apply numeracy, literacy and ICT skills to a moderate level. The findings however revealed that most of the items on foundational skills were moderately applied. This result signifies an average level of performance which is neither impressive nor unremarkable in the application of foundational by Business Education graduates. This shows that what is applied by Business Education graduates in the aspect of foundational skills is quite inadequate compared to what is expected by employers since Business Education graduates are barely proficient in their application of foundational skills. This further shows that though the curriculum content of the BusinessEducationprogramme may seem to be adequate but it has not been able to achieve the needed result of producing adequate man-power for the industry. The finding shows that there seems to be a lacuna either from the school system or from the method of teaching or it may be as a result of inadequate educators, or lack of necessary infrastructure that may have resulted in the inadequate application of foundational skills by Business Education graduates.

The findings of this study are in agreement with the findings of Adeyemo et al (2010); Akinyemi, Ofem, & Ikuenomore (2015); Rosenberg, Heimler, Morote (2012); Ogboro & Nwadiani (2017), Aghenta, (1993) which states that there is a disparity between what is applied and what is expected by employers from graduates and that the graduates are barely proficient in the application of employability skills especially in English proficiency, deficiency in basic mathematical skills which encompasses the foundational skills, and communicative skills. The finding also agrees with the assertions made by Nwagwu (1998); Asuquo & Adegbola (2014), Okpiaifo (2016), Christian (2017). which states that communicative skills which is a major part of foundational skills are lacking in Nigerian graduates.

The findings further revealed that there is no significant difference between the Mean Ratings of public and private employers on the application of numeracy, literacy and ICT skills by Business Education graduates in Edo and Delta States. This finding is in agreement with that of Jonck & Minaar (2015). The authors state that there is no significant difference between the private and the public sector and that they are becoming less marked. By implication therefore, the finding of this study pointed out that the nature of organization can not affect the application of foundational skills of graduates.

CONCLUSION

From the findings of the study, it can be observed that the application of the three aspects of foundational skills were moderately applied by OTM graduates. The result of this study shows that the application of foundational employability skills is below expectations of Supervisors. The findings of this study have shown that the assertions made by some researchers that there aresignificant gap between employers' needs and the actual skill levels and abilities of graduates who enter the labour pool to apply these skills are quite true. This therefore implies that the training received on foundational skill by Business Education graduates is inadequate to meet the challenges of the competitive business environment and the demands of employers, hence, the need for practical skills to be emphasized more to enable the Business Education graduates meet the demands of the labour market.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The observed deficiencies in literacy, numeracy and communicative skills which constitute the foundational skills should be adequately addressed by revamping the general studies courses such as use of English, basic mathematics in general studies units in tertiary institutions.Also,those students who feel their written skills are lacking should create a blog, or maybe volunteer their services to students' magazine which will boost their writing skills.Students should engage in literary and debating societies in order to improve their writing and speaking skills. As the saying goes: practice makes perfect.Government agencies and institutional management should concentrate in the training of Business Education educators to enable use ICT skills for better methodology for the teaching of ICT courses in order to produce OTM graduates who can fit properly into the real world of work.Educational planners and policy makers should ensure effective and regular program planning to remain abreast with the skills needed for the changing world and to ensure the desired results of the program are being attained.There should be review of the Business Education curriculum by curriculum planners in line with the realities on ground for the production of needed quality manpower for the industry by incorporate the right teaching strategies into the curriculum with emphasis on practical applications that will be given enough time to enable graduates gain mastery of the needed skills.

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