



EMPLOYABILITY- CENTERED CURRICULUM AND BUSINESS EDUCATION STUDENTS' LABOUR MARKET PROSPECTS IN RIVERS STATE

PROF. MARGARET E. AKPOMI

*Department of Business Education
Faculty of Education
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt
megakpomi@yahoo.com*

DR. CHRISTIAN O. IKPESU

*Department of Business Education
Faculty of Education
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt
coghenerukevwe@yahoo.com*

Abstract

This is a descriptive study conducted to examine the concept of employability-centered curriculum and labour market prospects of Business Education students. In achieving the underlying purpose, a sample of 70 Business Educators and programme coordinators charged with curriculum planning and implementation was used in the study. A 23- item instrument, structured on a 4-point rating scale was validated and pilot tested and the reliability coefficient was calculated using Pearson Product Moment Coefficient to achieve 0.87 internal consistencies. Quantitative data collected from respondents were analyzed using Descriptive statistics-means and standard deviation. The findings showed that broader career-specific learning environment, experiential learning, professional skill development, global orientations and access to business information in students' specific discipline are core employability-centered curriculum framework of action that could guide curriculum and instruction planners in universities. The study recommended that rebranding of institution's mission, system-wide employability curriculum and interface with industry are practical approaches university could undertake to enrich the educational experience of their students and ensure their successful transition into the labour market. These best practices when incorporated into the curriculum by institution management would help students develop valuable career-specific employability skills that guarantee the employers and assure stakeholders of students' readiness for employment. Institutional leadership in various universities should be encouraged to adopt the employability-centered dimensions and set up practical approaches as framework of action to broaden the current Business Education curriculum so as to provide students, valuable competencies required by employers.

Keywords: *Labour market, Curriculum, Employability-centered curriculum, Innovative pedagogy, Employment.*



Introduction

Conventional education has become inadequate for labour market preparation. In recent times, researchers have pathetically reacted differently to the current global skills mismatch between university graduates and needs of potential employers (Arum & Roksa, 2014, YouGov Survey, 2013, Gergen & Rego 2014, Mourshed, Patel & Suder 2014, Calonge & Shah, 2016). Many companies today find it increasingly difficult getting graduates with the right skills for the entry-level positions and thus contributing to the global unemployment phenomenon (Harris, 2013). City & Guilds (2013) survey reported that three quarters of employers in the Information Technology (IT) and Digital industries swiftly lamented the educational system inability to meet the needs of business. In corroborating these viewpoints, Belkin (2015), Mourshed & Suder (2014) attributed the prevalent condition to significant disconnect between the world of education and employment resulting in difficulty in finding qualified applicants. Employment sectors today are 'hollow-out shells' for lack of skilled graduates and the leading reason for entry-level vacancies (IET, 2014; Kaka, Madgavkar, Manyika, Bughin & Parameswaran, 2014). The aspirations of young people and their future prosperity have been negatively affected thereby creating global unemployment problem (Coughlan, 2014; Akpomi & Nnadi, 2010). In many instances, the curriculum content operated in universities is incompatible with competences needed for employment. This situation suggests continue scientific interest to connect the existing curriculum in business education to labour market reality. Khurana (2007), Mamun & Mohamad, (2009), Global Business School Network (GBSN, 2017) all propose strengthening the operational curriculum to be more intellectual relevant and connects it to students' career in the immediate and the medium term. Curriculum as an instrument of knowledge construction, the concept of employability has been over-theorized and subjected to conventional methods of teaching that produce job hunters than graduates having entrepreneurial instincts and intentions. Curriculum is the fundamental source of all intellectual disciplines. Generally, curriculum in higher education is a body of interdependent knowledge sequentially and systematically planned to provide students qualitative learning and career education. There are several dimensions to curriculum planning and the process is subject to multifactor analysis. The cognitive theorists refer to learning as logical method for organizing and interpreting learning activities. Learning experiences are demonstrated through specific practices like



reflective thinking, creative thinking, intuitive thinking and discovery learning. Samuel & Alamina (2006) and Akpomi (2005) described curriculum as all the experiences, total programme of activities or learning of educational objectives planned and directed by the school to attain its educational goals. The Tyler's model divided specifically into four ideological strands such as purpose, organization of experience, methods of teaching and evaluation; although still remain very relevant in education today but never envisaged possible changes in the labour market as a result of globalization and technological changes. This blight future prospects facing business education graduates in Nigeria requires employability centered curriculum that can satisfactorily meet the unstable demands of employers. Employability-centered curriculum is a paradigm shift from the traditional known perspective of curriculum to knowledge-based and skill-based learning that prepare students for enterprise development, self-employment and social adjustment in society. Employability connects the university and the marketplace together and enhances institutional capacity to deliver highly innovative curricula to students by integrating academics to vocation. Kao and Mao (2011), Ikpesu (2017) suggest customized curricula that could satisfactorily meet students' personal needs and prepare them to learn critical skills, knowledge and attitudes to compete favourably in their target global markets. Juvonen (2012) enjoin universities and educators in particular all over the world to provide university students with appropriate skills that offer them opportunity for higher success during studies and also after graduation since life challenges in the years ahead are unpredictable.

Employability as a cardinal aspect of curricula has attracted enormous contextual definitions and scientific contribution from different scholars. Blackmore, Bulaitis, Jackman & Tan (2016), Huang, Turner & Chen (2014) had observed that employability has assumed a global recognition and popularity thus increasing attention is being given to the role of higher education in developing employability. Employability-centered curriculum is a paradigm shift from the traditional known perspective of curriculum. Business education providers must seek to improve the employability levels of students and graduates thereby ensuring that their skills and knowledge are fit-for-purpose for the graduate labour market after graduation (Val-Ossai & Akpomi, 2017). Employability is generally knowledge-based and skill-based curriculum that prepares students for world of work, enterprise development, self-employment and social adjustment in society as depicted below:

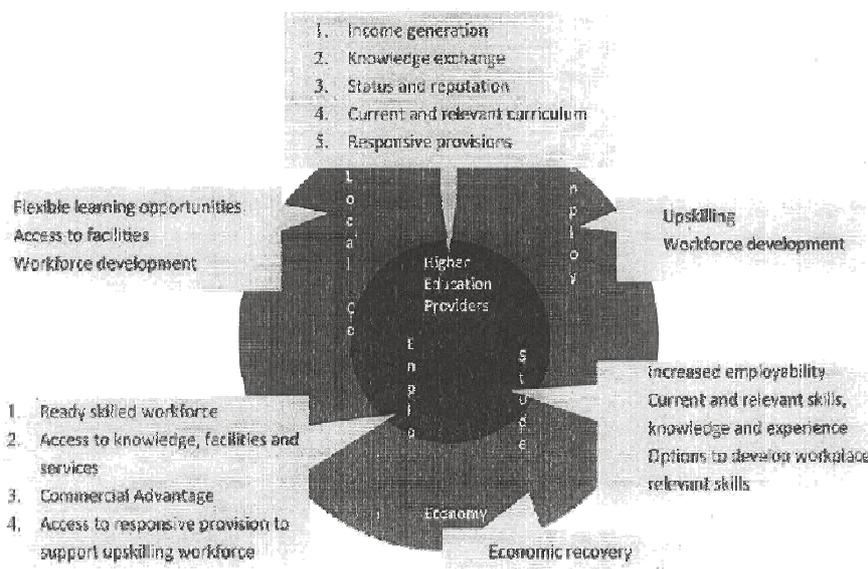


Figure 1: Stakeholders in Employability

Blackmore, Bulaitis, Jackman & Tan (2016: 10). Employability in higher education: A review of practice and strategies around the world, University of Exeter. The infographic clearly outlined key partners' participation in institution-wide employability-based curriculum in universities. Employability is a new concept that connects the university and the marketplace. It is the ability of university to deliver highly innovative curricula to students through integration of academics and vocation in an appropriate manner. Employability objectives are embedded into the curriculum as responsive mechanisms to employer demands and serial changes in workplace. Employability fosters multiple means of engagement for students and facilitates their transition to the workplace. Thus, employability is the combination of knowledge, competences and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to secure employment and continue progressively during their career (Blackmore et al, 2016). University of Kansas' Roadmap for Creating Global Professionals (2014) considers employability-centered curriculum as a means of producing graduates having the ability to thrive in a dynamic and increasingly uncertain workforce. Thus, employability is the capability of an individual to find suitable work after graduation having possessed both expert proficiency in particular field and intelligent application of expertise to a wider contexts, communicate well and ably adapt to new



information. Yorke and Mantz (2004) define employability as a practical intelligence related to specific and contextual knowledge which is tacit and resistant to capture because it is intuitive quality. Employability is the person's capability to re-organize existing knowledge in new and unexpected combinations by envisioning relative merits of opposing or contesting arguments or by an understanding of the deep complexity of language in its different forms, historical or contemporary (Knight & Mantz, 2004). Employability is discipline-specific build into the curriculum to strengthen student's desirable competencies such as communication, abstract thinking and emotional intelligence and apply expertise to multiple contexts, industry and workplace. Corroborating these viewpoints, Samson (2013) described employability as highly human skills that included basic thinking skills and symbolism, conscious monitoring and control, hypothesizing, creativity and imagination, subjective decision making, social skills and responsibility. In analyzing employability and its social capital consequences the concept is connected to innovative methods of learning. NBEA (2003) however observed that amidst the variety of instructional strategies appropriate for business education classroom, too often, many business educators have strong preference for few which they are mostly comfortable with. Teaching in the 21st century must traverse beyond transferring existing information to students to creating learning environments that stimulate them to take responsibility, create knowledge through shared practice and bolster their self-confidence. Scientific arguments underpinned explicit implications of teaching methods for enhancing student participation and boosting higher order learning and interest. Juvonen (2012) posits that the pedagogical background for the School of future will be based on learning as social and communal process, teaching as the driving force of the process while knowledge is the fuel and product of the learning process.

The emerging impact of case studies is related to increase learning positivity (NBEA, 2003; Albaqami, 2016; Mohammad, 2015; Tracy & Wadeldfogel, 1997; Romm & Pliskin, 2000; Brabston, Henley & White, 1999). Case methods as an integral instructional strategy applies in business education as critically analyzing real world problem and construct knowledge (Rosenthal 2016). Case method refers to critical examination of a situation to elicit a response or action, followed by a thorough discussion of observations, opinions, interpretations, recommendations and expected outcomes. In other words, case studies are student-centered instructional



strategy used by business educators to provide students apt opportunity to objectively diagnose a problem and proffer solution. These viewpoints are supported by social learning theory that makes learning a social participation (Wenger, 1998). The various classification of the process of learning include meaning (experience), identity (learning to become), practice (learning as doing), and community (learning as belong). Learning environment connects community of students together to share the same interests, objectives even beliefs and values (Brown & Duguid, 1991). Social learning environment engenders experimental learning with resultant effects of emerging communities of students as practitioners of knowledge. The ideological strands of social learning environment are quite strengthened by experimental learning and active learning behaviour. Kolb (1984) defines experimental learning as a central process of human adaptation to the social and physical environment. Experimental learning is subdivided into active experimentation, divergent knowledge, reflective observation and abstract conceptualization. These different paths of knowledge construction are very fundamental to students. Kolb's definition of affective complex learning environments as learning situation which emphasizes the act of experiencing what is actually like to be a professional in one's discipline under study. Business educators as role model in the profession relate, communicate to individual students personally as a colleague rather than an authority and provide personalized feedback that satisfactorily meets each student needs and goals (Akpomi & Amesi, 2013). These learning experiences are major sources of knowledge creation, evolving employability skills needed to become successful and highly competitive in the labour market. However, the concept of employability is not limited only to employment but a combination or 'set of achievements' of skills, knowledge, understanding and personal attributes, that collectively make a graduate more likely to gain and remain in employment (EACEA, 2015, Oliveira, 2015, Williams & Crammer, 2009). This supportive argument implies that employability is value-oriented, engenders intellectual rigour and meaningful engagement. Therefore, employability is seen as individual attribute that enhances his success within employment hence employability skills are skills for life (Cole & Tibby, 2013). Employment is the productive and profitable engagement of individuals using acquired knowledge, skills and technology to contribute meaningfully to organization either as employees, managers, or self-employed, entrepreneurs and producers. Employment is therefore one most important way individuals contribute to economic growth using their human capital.



Research Questions

How do the various dimensions of employability-centered curriculum in business education directly broaden facilitate students labour market prospects?

What are those institutional practical approaches for developing labour market-driven curriculum?

What are those valuable employability competences required in the curriculum to enhance business education students' labour market prospects?

Methods

The descriptive study generated analytical data that supports the reinvention of the long practiced conventional curriculum that is inadequate in preparing students for the highly flexible labour market. In achieving the study objectives, the researcher scholarly engaged in thematic literature search and discussed the concepts of labour market, curriculum, employability-centered curriculum, and innovative pedagogical practices and employment. The accessible population of 70 Business Educators was obtained from the two-state owned universities, namely, Rivers State University and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. The entire population made up the sample, since it was manageable. This study group has versatile knowledge and practical experience in curriculum planning and implementation to provide leading information about the employability-centered curriculum in the universities in Rivers State. A 23 item questionnaire structured on 4 point rating scale of Strongly Agreed (SA) -4point, Agreed (A) -3point, Disagreed (D) -2point and Strongly Disagreed (SD) -1point was used to obtain data. The instrument was validated by Business Education curriculum and Measurement and Evaluation experts respectively. Pilot testing was done in Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island, Amassoma; responses were calculated using Pearson Product Moment Coefficient (PPMC) to achieve 0.87 coefficient reliability. The instrument was then administered by the researchers to the respondents. Finally, quantitative data collected from 60 respondents were analyzed using descriptive statistics, namely, mean and standard deviation. The analytical decision is categorized into maximum mean score of 2.50 and above as agreed while the minimum mean result of 2.05 represents disagreed.



Result Presentation

Table 1: Mean Analysis of Dimensions of Employability for enhancing Labour Market Prospects

S/N	Measurement Instrument	0	STD
1.	create broader career-specific learning environment	2.52	.5570
2.	initiate and support policies that experiential learning	2.52	.5909
3.	introduce to students world of work useful to them	2.77	.4233
4.	introduce courses that will enhance students professional skills	2.59	.7310
5.	initiate meaningful networks that provide students access opportunities	3.23	.5784
6.	initiate and implement courses that give students global perspectives	2.74	.5213
7.	access to global information in their respective discipline	2.95	.8050

The analytical table clearly showed mean results above the minimum cut off point which signify that the various measurable dimensions of employability-based curriculum are critical to students' labour market prospects.

Table 2: Mean Responses for Practical Approaches for implementing Employability Curriculum

S/N	Institutional Practical Techniques	0	STD
1.	Rebranding institutional missions to support EC	3.74	.5023
2.	Introduce institution-wide employability-based curricula	3.00	.0000
3.	Involving faculty and external stakeholders in implementing the curriculum	3.48	.6707
4.	Creating Online platform to drive the employability curriculum	3.41	.5140
5.	Introduce Online learning module to engage the students	3.61	.4888
6.	Introduce and use flexible assessment tools to make the process more reliable	3.24	.4293
7.	organizing regular workshops to acquaint students with the values of labour market	3.75	.4351
8.	Institutional interface with industry is vital to labour market orientation	3.30	.4637
9.	Create and support workplace environment connecting the classroom to career aspiration	3.79	.4033

The table above showed higher mean results which implies that these practical approaches are key to institution-wide employability-centered learning environment to leverage on student future labour market prospects.



Table 3: Mean Responses of Valuable Competencies

S/N	Measurement Instrument	0	STD
1.	The ability to plan and prioritize work is a major curricula step for meeting student labour market need.	3.13	.5490
2.	Being able to communicate effectively is very important need of employer	2.63	.5641
3.	EC problem solving orientation meets need of labour market	2.72	.4483
4.	leveraging student commercial awareness is most essential	2.58	.751
5.	EC prepare students to be enterprise minded and is mostly valued labour market need	2.91	.477
6.	Collaboration is a major workplace need of employer in institutional curricula	2.70	.5282
7.	Leadership quality is key EC way for meeting students' labour market need.	2.90	.7821

The above table has shown some selected most valuable competencies employers want students have in order to be fit-for-purpose and become sought-after professionals in the labour market.

Discussion of Major Findings

The findings uncovered some specific dimensions of employability critical to the development of adaptable and multilayered skill labour force. The multi-purpose dimensions of employability are fundamental action framework universities could apply when employability curriculum is planned and implemented in business education. Employability-based curriculum in business education integrates both academic learning, experiential learning for professional development and career maturity, meaningful connections and global perspectives for meaningful student learning experiences. The curriculum as knowledge-based and skill-based learning activity is adapted to economic and technological changes students' likely faced in labour market. In this way, many universities purposively respond to the negative public perceptions of graduate ability to find suitable employment. Employability significantly determined employment chances of young degree holders. Contrary to these findings, Mourshed, Farrell and Barton (2013) noted that 44% young adults still face uncertainty or unpredicted circumstances excepts their post-secondary education has improved their chances of finding a job. The practical approaches identified in this study such as rebranding missions, introduction of institution-wide employability-based curriculum, organizing regular workshop, using flexible



assessment tools are essential requirements for setting up employability-centered learning environment to leverage on student future labour market prospects. These practical approaches redirect the various learning experiences and adequately prepare students for their professional work-life.

The findings had also corroborated some institutional best practices initiated by institutional managers at different levels in making employability-based curriculum university affair. Such universities rebrand their existing missions to support employability, initiate and implement university -wide employability curriculum; organize workshops for faculty and external stakeholders to drive the new policies. Employability curriculum is implemented using online platform and online modules to stimulate self-pace learning and knowledge construction. Importantly, flexible online assessment tools are designed to evaluate active participation and strengthen student career exploration. Institutional interface with industry plays significant role and promotes the culture of internship, expose them to world of work and develop practical intelligence necessary for employment and entrepreneurship. The learning environment therefore connects community of students together to share the same interests, objectives even beliefs and values (Brown & Duguid, 1991). In response to the concern for skill gap palaver and employer unstable employment conditions, certain competencies have been found to be employer most valuable employability skills. Specifically, these most valuable competencies employers want students have in order to be fit-for-purpose and become sought-after professionals in the labour market include ability to plan and prioritize work, effective communication, problem solving skills and commercial awareness. The competencies, skills, and knowledge are important requirements to secure and retain a job, progress at work and cope with change. Employers have strong preference for worker enterprise that can intelligently identify opportunities for money and provide the needed leadership in leveraging the organization growth.

Conclusion

Employability-based curriculum is a contemporary approach adopted by universities to address the incompatibility of operational curriculum and labour market unstable conditions. The various employability-centered require universities rebranding their institution missions, create and strengthen internal and external interface, introduce online platform and online modules for the implementation of



system-wide employability-based curricula. This career-specific learning environment created by the university adequately prepare students' professional skills, build meaningful network and access to opportunities, enhance their global outlook and access to global business information. Students on the other hand acquire career-specific competencies such as planning and prioritization of work, effective communication, commercial awareness, collaboration or teamwork coordination and leadership skills prefer by employers. These valuable competencies changed their global outlook and make them most sought-after-professionals ready for employment or entrepreneurship.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made for the creation of employability-centered curriculum:

Adoption of employability-centered dimensions as framework of action to rethink and broaden the current Business Education curriculum so as to develop students valuable competencies required by employers.

Strengthen their interface with external stakeholders in order to create career-specific learning environment for students' professional development and adequate industrial exposure to complement theories and concepts.

Create online platform and modules to support the implementation of employability-based curriculum and give students flexible self-pace learning and individualized knowledge construction and improve their global outlook.

References

- Akpomi, M.E. & Amesi, Joy. (2013). Effective teaching of business studies in secondary and tertiary institutions: teachers' preferred methods. *Business Studies Research Journal (BUSREJ)* Vol. 2, No. 2 pp 27-51.
- Akpomi, M.E. (2005). Organising business education. Port Harcourt: Pre-Joe Publishers.
- Akpomi, M.E. & Nnadi, M.A. (2010). Entrepreneurial competence and entrepreneurship among National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) members in Nigeria. *Interdisciplinary Studies Journal (ISJ)*. Vol.1, No.1, pp 8-15.
- Arum, R. & Roksa, J. (2014). *Aspiring adults adrift: Tentative transitions of college graduates*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.



- Belkin, D. (2015). Test finds college graduates lack skills for white collar jobs. *Wall Street Journal*. <http://www.wsj.com/articles/test-finds-many-students-ill-prepared-to-enter-work-force-1421432744>. Retrieved Sept 2, 2019.
- Blackmore, P., Bulaitis, Z. H., Jackman, A.H. & Tan, E. (2016). *Employability in higher education: A review of practice and strategies around the world*. Exeter: University of Exeter.
- Brown, J. & Duguid, P. (1991). Organizational learning and communities of practice; Toward a unified view of working, learning and innovation. *Organization Science* Vol 2. No. 1, pp 40-57
- Cheng-Man Lau, D. (2006). Analysing the curriculum development process: Three models. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society* 9: 1, p 29-44 <http://doi.org/10.1080/14681360100200107>, Taylor and Francis Group
- City & Guilds Survey (2013). Making education work: Preparing young people for the workplace. [Http://www.cityandguilds.com/media/techbac/documents/news/research/making-education%20pdf.ash](http://www.cityandguilds.com/media/techbac/documents/news/research/making-education%20pdf.ash). Date retrieved September 02, 2019.
- Coughlan, S. (2014). Skills gap damaging young and employers across Europe. BBC News. [Http://www.bbc.com/news/education-25714313](http://www.bbc.com/news/education-25714313).
- Global Business School Network (2017 retrieved). Business education should focus on relevance. [Https://gbsn.org](https://gbsn.org).
- Harris, S. (2013, September 12). Half of employers say graduates are 'not up to the job': Findings fuel fears universities fail to equip students with life skills. [Http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2419431/Half-employers-say-graduates-job-Findings-fuel-fears-universities-fail-equip-students-life-skills.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2419431/Half-employers-say-graduates-job-Findings-fuel-fears-universities-fail-equip-students-life-skills.html).
- Ikpesu, O.C. (2017). Globalizing business education curriculum experiences in Nigeria higher education for enhanced students' employability. *European Journal of Business and Innovation Research*. Vol. 5 No. 5, pp 47-57.
- Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET, 2014). Skills and demand in industry report. [Http://www.theiet.org/factfiles/education/skills2014-page.cfm](http://www.theiet.org/factfiles/education/skills2014-page.cfm).
- Juvonen, P. (2012). Fostering entrepreneurship by developing a new learning environment within a Finnish University of Applied Science. *Entrepreneurship - Born, Made and Educated* edited by Thierry B.H. Intech.org, pp 225-246.
- Kaka, N., Madgavkar, A., Manyika, J., Bughin, J.& Parameswaran, P. (2014). *India's tech opportunity: Transforming work, empowering people*. Delhi: McKinsey & Company.



- Kao, D. & Mao, T. (2011). A framework for designing business education with dynamic changes in global competition. *Journal of Higher Education Theory and Practice*, Vol.11 No. 1, pp 9-20
- Khurana, R. (2007). From higher aims to hired hands: the social transformation of American business schools and the unfulfilled promise of management as a profession. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Knight, P. & Yorke, M. (2004). Learning, curriculum, and employability in higher education, London: Routledge.
- Kolb, D. (1984). Experimental learning. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Mamun, M.A. & Mohamad, A.B. (2009). Management education for contemporary challenges: The role of business school. *European Journal of Scientific Research*, 30 (4). pp 649-661
- Mourshed, M., Farrell, D & Barton, D. (2013). Education to employment: Designing a system that works. McKinsey: Center for Government.
- Mourshed, M., Patel, J., & Suder, K. (2014). Education to employment: Getting Europe's youth into work. Washington DC: McKinsey Center for Government.
- National Business Education Association (NBEA, 2003). Effective methods of teaching business education in the 21st century. Yearbook No. 41, Published by NBEA. www.nbea.org.
- Romm, C.T. & Pliskin, N. (2000). How can we use case studies to promote soft skills in IS education? *Journal of informatics Education and Research*, 2(3), pp1-10.
- Rosenthal, D.W. (2016). The art of case teaching. Annals of Entrepreneurship Education and pedagogy (ed) by Michael, H.M and Eric L. Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing. Inc.
- Samson, R. (2013). Highly human jobs. *The Futurist*, May June edition, p 29-35.
- Samuel, J. & Alamina, J. (2007). Fundamental principles of curriculum process and planning. Owerri: Career Publishers.
- Tracy, J. & Waldfogel, J. (1997). The best Business Schools: A market based approach. *Journal of Business*. 3(1) pp1-31.
- Val-Ossai, M.U. & Akpomi, M.E. (2017). Entrepreneurship education and empowering 21st century Business Education students for employability. *Rivers Business Education Journal (RIVBEJ)*. Vol 2, No 1 pp 12-21.
- Wenger, E. (1998). Communities of practice, learning, meaning and identity. Cambridge University Press.
- Y o u G o v S u r v e y (2 0 1 3) . G o o d u n i v e r s i t y g u i d e .
[http://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus uploads/document/w401exiom/YG-Achive-news-UK-results-130813-Good-University-Guide-B2B.pdf](http://d25d2506sfb94s.cloudfront.net/cumulus/uploads/document/w401exiom/YG-Achive-news-UK-results-130813-Good-University-Guide-B2B.pdf)