

EVALUATING THE SOFT SKILL COMPETENCES REQUIRED OF BUSINESS EDUCATION STUDENTS FOR ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT

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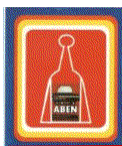
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Abstract

The paper evaluates the soft skills competencies required by business education students for entrepreneurship development in Cross River State, Nigeria. To achieve the objective, two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. A survey research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised 120 business education students. The Census population was used. A validated researcher-made four-point rating scale questionnaire titled, "Evaluating of Soft Skills Competencies Required by Business Education Students' for Entrepreneurship Development (ESSCRBESEDQ)" was used for data collection. The instrument was field and content validated by three research experts. A reliability estimate of .87 was achieved for the instrument using the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient after a pilot test. A mean and standard deviation were used to answer all the research questions, while an independent t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The result of the study revealed that business education students required organizing skills competencies and customers' skills competencies for the development, management, and sustainability of their businesses for the economic growth and development in Nigeria. It was concluded that there was a need to put in place the institutional variables that could help business education students acquire the skills and competencies. It was recommended, among other things, that the business education department should partner with the industry to offer their students the required training for the effective acquisition of organizing skills competencies needed in the world of business and that business education students should be endeavored to acquire all the relevant skills necessary for them to create, and maintain their customer service needs.

Keywords: Evaluating, Soft Skills, Competencies, Entrepreneurship development

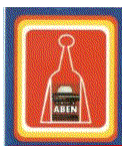


Introduction

A society's economic, social, and political development can be accelerated by education, which also serves as a springboard for society development (Akpomi, 2009). Education in the correct form continues to be a tool for empowering individuals and generations, according to Olawolu and Kaegon (2012). A beneficiary of entrepreneurial education is one who is expected to be instilled with the entrepreneurial spirit (business mindset) in a way that combines innovative or creative ideas with management and organizational skills for fusing people, money, and resources to address needs and generate wealth (Osuala, 2009 & Oduma, 2012). Entrepreneurial education, according to Lankard (1991), is a lifelong learning process that begins in elementary school and continues through all stages of education. By involving young people in practical learning situations where they can take risks, handle the results, and learn from the experience, it helps them become responsible and highly enterprising future business owners or thinkers. Organizational skills, customer service skills, management skills, leadership development, and interpersonal skills are all things that people with disabilities and others can gain through entrepreneurial education. These are all highly transferrable talents that employers are looking for. The goal of entrepreneurial education, according to Olaniyi (2016), is to motivate and prepare graduates of secondary schools and higher education institutions to pursue self-employment. After graduation, students who have developed their entrepreneurial talents can launch their own businesses and become independent.

Emejulu (2014) defines entrepreneurial activity as the act of becoming an entrepreneur, which includes the process of coming up with ideas, taking business risks brought on by a dynamic environment, and taking use of possibilities to the fullest for financial gain. Being entrepreneurial allows one to be inventive, creative, and willing to take calculated risks in order to succeed as an entrepreneur. An entrepreneur is someone who is inventive, resourceful, skilled, and willing to take risks in order to succeed in business. The entrepreneur is a wealth-maker and starter. According to Deen in Ezenwafor and Olaniyi (2016), there is mounting scientific evidence that entrepreneurship may boost employment, productivity, and economic growth through the creation of small and medium-sized businesses. The introduction of entrepreneurial education at higher institutions is the only way to achieve this since the future economic development of Nigeria may be entirely dependent on productive youths who are prepared to use their minds and hands for positive changes and progress. After graduation, this could create skills among young people in Nigeria, particularly in Cross River State.

According to Fulani (2006), the purpose of an entrepreneurial program is to motivate and prepare recent graduates of secondary schools and higher education institutions to pursue self-employment. It would seem that Fulani's (2006) claim may have inspired the Federal Ministry of Education (FME) to add entrepreneurial and ICT courses to all of Nigeria's postsecondary institutions. According to his opinion, there are a ton of work chances available as a result of business education training. These options include the creation of small and medium-sized businesses, which, if managed well, would keep family members gainfully employed and produce enough revenue to support their families and steadily raise their standard of life in society. Look at entrepreneurial education, according to Chukwurah and Atah (2019), is an educational program created for the training of individual learners for the acquisition of skills. This kind of educational program was implemented by Nigeria as a developing nation to advance its economic growth. They added that "the individual capacity to transform ideas into action" is what entrepreneurial education is all about. It comprises the capacity to organize and manage initiatives in order to accomplish goals and take control of one's own life, as well as innovation, risk-taking, and creativity. Ukah and Atah (2021) define entrepreneurial education as the type of instruction provided to awaken people's sense of initiative and their capacity to convert ideas into reality. Each student is guaranteed the opportunity to become an entrepreneur with the inclusion of entrepreneurship education in the school curriculum.



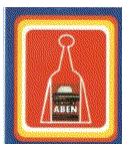
However, Bird in Mafikuyomi (2014) argued that entrepreneurial abilities also include general and specific information, motivations, experiences, self-images, social rulers, and skills, which lead to the emergence, survival, and expansion of businesses. It should be highlighted that specific competences, including but not limited to organizing skills competencies and customer service skills competencies, are necessary for graduates of business education to operate profitable and effective businesses. However, the current severe unemployment among business education program graduates brought on by the world economic crisis made. The Federal Government should emphasize the need for all Nigerians to work toward self-reliance through self-employment, especially among graduates of higher institutions who studied business, particularly in Cross River State's colleges of education and universities. The development of soft skills competences among business education graduates in colleges of education may aid the graduates in becoming self-sufficient or finding profitable employment in the face of unfavorable economic conditions.

Characteristics and social skills that affect how successfully a person can work or interact with others are referred to as soft skills competencies. It covers a broad range of abilities, including delegation, time management, empathy, and cooperation. Soft skills are additional character traits that affect how well you operate or connect with people in a professional setting. It is simpler to build relationships with individuals, establish dependability and trust, and lead teams when you have organizational and customer service abilities. Compared to hard abilities like coding, the value of these soft talents is frequently underestimated and they receive much less training. Organizations appear to assume that employees understand proper workplace conduct and the value of abilities like initiative, good communication, and listening, but this is frequently not the case.

Organizing skills competencies involve coordinating and allocating business resources in order to carry out their plans. It includes developing a structure for the people, positions, departments, and activities within the firm. This is accomplished by dividing up tasks (division of labor), grouping jobs and employees (departmentalization), and assigning authority and responsibilities (delegation). Once a plan has been created, a manager can begin to organize. Before a plan can be implemented, managers must organize the assets of the business to execute the plan efficiently and effectively. Understanding specialization and the division of work is key to this effort, since many of the "assets" are employees.

Customer service skills competencies consist of a collective set of policies that govern every way you and your employees interact with your customers. It encompasses everything from how much parking you have available to how you greet customers, handle service complaints, and back up your product or service. At its core, quality customer service is about making sure your customers feel valued, treated fairly, and appreciated by your business. Customer service skills competencies are important in business because they retain customers and extract more value from them in the business world. When these soft skills are acquired by business education graduates, it will be providing top-notch customer service, businesses recoup customer acquisition costs and cultivate a loyal following that refers customers, serves as case studies, and provides testimonials.

Ukah and Atah (2021) opined that if there is collaboration among business education lecturers', it could create an opportunity for the students to acquire competencies that are required for entrepreneurial development. Atsu, Ateb and Atah (2021) agreed that, students are expected to acquire both theoretically and practically component of business education. Otum and Atah (2021) revealed that the effective discharging of teachers' duties is the major factor for learners to acquire soft skills competencies for employability. Agim, Ochui, & Atah (2020) observed that teachers' job performance plays a vital role in the acquisition of soft skills competencies among business education graduates. Atah, Ogbiji, and Agbor, (2019) are in opined that, staff development through workshops, seminars and conferences could enable the business education teachers to function effectively in the classroom for skills acquisition among business education graduates. Atsu, Ateb and Atah (2021) affirmed the development of staff is a cardinal point for



teaching and learning process. This may help the teachers to learn new technology for the acquisition of soft skills among business education students for self-reliant or to gainful employ (Atah, Ukah and Crossdale 2019). Software programs like MS Excel, MS term, zoom and Peer tutoring could be used in the teaching and learning process for soft skills acquisitions (Atah, Ukah and Crossdale 2019). The acquisition of skills competencies open the door for opportunities; therefore, the management of various institutions should adopt the right leadership styles, especially the ones that are contingent on the time that could help the students of business education to acquire the needed skills competencies (Atah, 2019). The instructional facilities such as computers and other reprographic materials are needed in the classroom for the acquisition of employability skills competencies (Atah and Abeng, 2019). The acquisition of skills could bring sustainability of small scale business operators for national economic development in Nigeria (Atah and Bessong, 2018).

Atah (2018) asserted skills refer to the set of skills, competencies, and attributes that increase a school-leaver's chances of obtaining initial worthwhile employment, maintaining and progressing in the employment, obtaining new employment if required, and being satisfied on the job. He further enumerates these skills including but not limited to analytical and problem-solving skills, numeracy, confidence, time management, team working, communication skills, information technology, and monitoring skills. Business education students in colleges of Education in Cross River State are required to obtain these skills that will help them to be employable. Okpan (2006) identified organizing competencies as the requisite for entrepreneurial development to include ability to capture and retain the attention of customers: ability to promote and sell the organization product; ability to analyze demand and supply situations, ability to acquire effective sales habit, ability to be self-reliant and tact, ability to acquire good sales techniques, ability to carry out effective marketing and information research, and ability to be polite, cheerful and glooming. Therefore, based on the foregoing, it seems that there is a problem in entrepreneurial development for Business Education graduates due to lack of required business skills to own businesses. Therefore, it is against this dilemma that it becomes critical to conduct this study *assessment of Soft skills competencies required by Business Education students for entrepreneurial development in Colleges of Education in Cross River State, Nigeria*.

Research Questions

Two research questions were formulated by the researchers to guide the study.

1. What are the organizing skills competencies required by business education students for entrepreneurial development in Cross River State, Nigeria?
2. What are the customer service skills competencies required by business education students for entrepreneurial development in Cross River State, Nigeria?

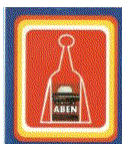
Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were raised and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female business education students regarding the organizing skills competencies needed for entrepreneurial development in Cross River State, Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female business education students regarding customer service skills competencies required for entrepreneurial development in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Methodology

A survey research design was used in this study. The study was carried out in two colleges of education in Cross River State, Nigeria. These colleges are the Federal College of Education, Obudu and the College of Education, Akampke, all in Cross River state, Nigeria. The population of



this study consists of 120 final year business education students for the 2021/2022 academic session from the two institutions. The entire *population was used for the study*. A 24 item validated researcher-made four-point rating scale questionnaire titled *The "Evaluating Soft Skills Competencies Required by Business Education Students Entrepreneurial Development Questionnaire (ESSCRBESEDQ)"* was used for data collection. The instrument was face and content validated by three research experts. A reliability estimate of .87 was achieved for the instrument using the Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient after a pilot test. The mean and standard deviation were used to answer all the research questions, while an independent t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1

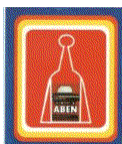
What are the organizing skills competencies required by business education students for entrepreneurial development in Cross River State, Nigeria Data answering the above research question are contained in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean ratings of responses of respondents on organizing skills competencies required by business education students for entrepreneurial development in Cross River State, Nigeria.

/No	Item Statement	N	Mean	Std. D	Decision
1	Organize material resources effectively	120	2.87	1.19	HR
2	Organize human resources effectively	120	2.92	1.11	HR
3	Organize financial resources effectively	120	2.91	1.05	HR
4	Organize intellectual resources effectively	120	2.79	1.18	HR
5	Organize sales production	119	2.76	1.11	HR
6	Organize intangible resources	120	2.78	1.09	HR
7	Organize technological resources	120	2.71	1.07	HR
8	Organize tangible resources	120	2.57	1.21	HR
9	Organizing digital resources effectively	120	2.82	1.13	HR
10	Organize emotional resources effectively	120	2.58	1.08	HR
11	Able to organize educational resources	120	2.60	1.18	HR
12	Organize physical resources effectively	120	2.77	1.03	HR
	Grand Mean	120	2.76	1.12	HR

Note: x = Mean; HQ = Highly Required

Table 1 shows that items 1–12 are the soft skills (organizing skills competencies) that are highly needed (HR) by graduates of Business Education Students for entrepreneurial development in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, each of the items obtained a mean score above 2.50. This implies that the respondents rated all the items listed as the organizing skills competencies needed for entrepreneurial development among business education students. The standard deviations for all the items are within the same range, indicating that respondents are homogenous in their mean ratings.



Research Question 2

What are the customer service skills competencies required by business education students for entrepreneurial development in Cross River State, Nigeria. Data answering the above research question are contained in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean ratings of responses of respondents on customer service skills competencies required by business education students for entrepreneurial development in Cross River State, Nigeria

S/NO	Item Statement	N	Mean	Std. D	Decision
13	Determine customers' need at a time	120	2.98	1.09	HR
14	Determine customers' door steps for supplies	120	2.89	1.06	HR
15	Able to Determine customers' interest	120	2.83	1.03	HR
16	Determine customer's patronage	120	2.83	1.06	HR
17	Handle customers' complaints satisfactorily	120	2.59	1.07	HR
18	Handle customers telephone calls appropriately	120	2.64	1.17	HR
19	Give customers access to available products	120	2.65	1.13	HR
20	Managing customers relation	120	2.52	1.12	HR
21	Effective presentation of available products	120	3.38	1.07	HR
22	Identify and result conflicts with customers	120	3.15	0.81	HR
23	Negotiate sales product with customers effectively	120	3.28	0.86	HR
24	Manage customer data appropriately	120	3.20	0.70	HR
		120	2.91	1.02	HR

Note: \bar{x} = Mean; HN = Highly Required

The result in Table 2 shows that items 13–24 soft skills (customers' service skills) competencies identified as highly required (HR) by Business Education students for entrepreneurial development. Specifically, each of the items obtained a mean score above 2.50. These customer service skills competencies are required by the students for entrepreneurial development. The standard deviations for all the items are within the same range, indicating that respondents are homogenous in their mean ratings.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female Business Education students in regarding the organizing skills competencies required for entrepreneurial development in Cross River State, Nigeria



Table 3: Summary of responses of male and female Business Education students in regarding the organizing skills competencies required for entrepreneurial development(n=120)

items	Respondents Category	N	Mean	Std. D	df	t-cal	Alpha	t-cri	decision
1	Male Students	54	2.8889	1.26888	118	.114	0.05	.018	S
	Female Students	66	2.8636	1.14873					
2	Male Students	54	2.8333	1.12853	118	-.812	0.05	.669	NS
	Female Students	66	3.0000	1.10940					
3	Male Students	54	3.0556	.99843	118	1.305	0.05	.537	NS
	Female Students	66	2.8030	1.09853					
4	Male Students	54	3.0000	1.13270	118	1.764	0.05	.227	S
	Female Students	66	2.6212	1.19955					
5	Male Students	54	2.8889	1.17629	118	1.089	0.05	.338	S
	Female Students	66	2.6667	1.05733					
6	Male Students	54	2.8333	1.09458	118	.451	0.05	.665	NS
	Female Students	66	2.7424	1.09980					
7	Male Students	54	2.5926	.98131	118	-	0.05	.105	S
	Female Students	66	2.8182	1.14903					
8	Male Students	54	2.7963	1.12232	118	1.824	0.05	.038	S
	Female Students	66	2.3939	1.26344					
9	Male Students	54	2.8704	1.15000	118	.395	0.05	.563	NS
	Female Students	66	2.7879	1.13022					
10	Male Students	54	2.6296	1.06923	118	.423	0.05	.670	NS
	Female Students	66	2.5455	1.09800					
11	Male Students	54	2.5370	1.17703	118	-.595	0.05	.913	NS
	Female Students	66	2.6667	1.19400					
12	Male Students	54	2.7407	1.08480	118	-.372	0.05	.255	S
	Female Students	64	2.8125	1.00593					
	Female Students	54	33.6667	13.3841	118	-0.37	0.05	0.416	S
	Female Students	64	32.7216	13.554					



The result in table 3 revealed that the calculated t-cal of. -0.37 is less than the critical value of 0.416 and tested at a.05 level of significance with 118 degrees of freedom. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted while the alternative hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there is a significant relationship between there is *no* significant difference in the mean responses of male and female business education students in regard to the organizing skills competencies needed for entrepreneurial development were retained. This implies that both the male and female business education graduates needed soft skills (organizing skills competencies) for the development and the sustainability of their businesses for economic development.

Hypothesis 2: *There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female graduates Business Education regarding customers service skills competencies needed for entrepreneurial development in Cross River State, Nigeria*

Table 4: Summary of *mean responses of male and female Business Education students in regarding customers service skills competencies required for entrepreneurial development (n=120)*

Items	Respondents Category	N	Mean	Std. D	df	t-cal	Alpha	t-cri	Decision
13	Male Students	54	2.9259	1.13023	118	-.519	0.05	.386	S
	Female Students	66	3.0303	1.06655					
14	Male Students	54	2.8148	1.10016	118	-.712	0.05	.313	S
	Female Students	66	2.9545	1.04413					
15	Male Students	54	2.9815	.99983	118	1.429	0.05	.386	S
	Female Students	66	2.7121	1.04903					
16	Male Students	54	2.7963	1.13901	118	-.344	0.05	.186	S
	Female Students	66	2.8636	1.00593					
17	Male Students	54	2.5926	1.09059	118	.009	0.05	.862	NS
	Female Students	66	2.5909	1.06666					
18	Male Students	54	2.7037	1.19163	118	.519	0.05	.934	NS
	Female Students	66	2.5909	1.17640					
19	Male Students	54	2.7407	1.11905	118	.719	0.05	.840	NS
	Female Students	66	2.5909	1.14995					
20	Male Students	54	2.5741	1.15908	118	.429	0.05	.648	NS
	Female Students	66	2.4848	1.11276					
21	Male Students	54	3.5556	.92485	118	1.593	0.05	.010	S
	Female Students	66	3.2424	1.17749					
22	Male Students	54	3.2778	.78708	118	1.450	0.05	.655	NS
	Female Students	66	3.0606	.83902					
23	Male Students	53	3.3962	.76811	118	1.252	0.05	.199	S
	Female Students	66	3.1970	.93183					
24	Male Students	54	3.2593	.70538	118	.831	0.05	.889	NS



	Female Students	66	3.1515	.70694					
	Male Students	54	35.6184	12.47	118	-.554	0.05	0.525	NS
	Female Students	66	34.4697	12.327					

The result in table 4 revealed that the calculated t-cal of $-.554$ is less than the critical value of 0.525 and tested at $.05$ level of significance with 118 degrees of freedom. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted while the alternative hypothesis was rejected. This implies that there is a significant difference between the mean responses of male and female business education students regarding customer service skills competencies needed for developing and the sustainability of their businesses for entrepreneurial development. This implies that both male and female business education students need soft skills (customers' service skills competencies) for the development and management of their businesses for economic growth and development.

Discussion

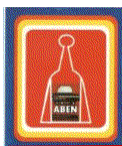
Organizing Competencies required by Business Education Students for Entrepreneurial Development in Cross River State, Nigeria.

Based on the data analysis on the soft skills (organizing skills competencies) on the development of entrepreneurial skills competencies in Table 1, the responses of the respondents indicated a highly required (HR) of organizing skills competencies by Business Education students in the Cross River State of Nigeria. The results are consistent with Chukwurah and Atah's (2019) opinions, who concurred that business education graduates will benefit from having employable skills competences. The study supported Atah and Abeng's (2019) assertion that entrepreneurial education is ingrained in the curriculum and that business education is equipped with programs that might enhance people's knowledge, skills, and understanding of carrying out activities related to their vocation. Students are equally permitted to participate in industrial training programs, and centers for skill acquisition have been established all over the world to help those who have completed business education develop the talents that will make them more marketable on the job market. This finding is consistent with the hypothesis made by Ukah and Atah (2021), who suggested that entrepreneurial development could aid students in developing a mindset for job creation by involving their brains in deep, constructive thought and nurturing ideas that could result in job creation among graduates of business education. Atah (2020). Therefore, it is crucial to emphasize that business education students at colleges of education need organizational skills in order to start any business activities for the growth of the country's economy or to create jobs for themselves.

The results of the tested hypotheses, however, revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean responses of male and female business education students in terms of the organizing skills competencies needed for entrepreneurship development in Cross River State, Nigeria. According to Atah, Ogbuji, and Agbor (2019), there are no discernible differences between males and girls in terms of abilities and competences, and the results support their assertion. Otum and Atah (2021), in agreement with the outcome, confirmed that there is no distinction between the acquisition of functional employability competences in business education. Both male and female counterparts needed the abilities to launch new enterprises and run current ones in order for the economy to develop.

Customer service skills competencies required by business education students for entrepreneurial development

Based on data research on the impact of soft skills (customer service competencies) on the development of entrepreneurial skills competencies, respondents' replies suggested that business education students had a high need (HR) for customer service skills abilities. The results are consistent with Atah, Fidel, and Bessong's (2017) assertion that graduates of business education



must possess certain abilities and competencies in order to be independent. The study concurs with Atah, Ogbuji, and Agbor (2019), who state in their work that the acquisition of skills and competences will increase the employability of business education graduates. Atah, Ukah, and Crossdale back up these conclusions (2019). *They revealed that the training received by business education students will **enhance the adequate knowledge skills and competences.***

The results of the tested hypotheses, however, revealed that there was no statistically significant difference in the mean responses of male and female business education students with regard to their customer service skills competencies required for entrepreneurship development in Cross River State, Nigeria. This may be due to the fact that both male and female students of business education required soft skills (competencies in customer service) for the creation and management of their businesses in order to promote economic development. The results support the assertions made by Atah and Bessong (2018), who claimed that there is no tangible difference between males and girls in terms of the abilities and competences required for employability among graduates of business education. The findings of Ateb, Atsu, and Atah (2021) contend that female students are better than their male counterparts at learning customer service abilities.

Conclusion

Based on the study's findings, it was determined that graduates of business education require entrepreneurial competences in organizing and customer service skills competencies for self-employment. These soft skill competencies may help the business education undergraduate become independent. Additionally, participants in entrepreneurial skill development programs have the advantage of starting any kind of enterprise to empower their families and can also turn their self-reliance abilities into self-employment. Once completed, the government will be relieved of a sizable portion of the unemployment burden. The study came to the additional conclusion that entrepreneurial courses can give students the abilities they need to be independent or self-employed in the workplace, including organizational and customer service competencies.

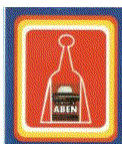
Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the following recommendations have been proposed:

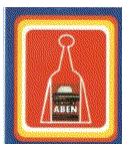
1. The Business Education department should collaborate with industry to provide students with the necessary training for successful learning of organizational skills essential to the business sector.
2. Students in business school should strive to learn all the abilities required to generate and sustain their clients' service demands.
3. Business education professors at institutions of education should guarantee that business education graduates develop soft skill competencies.

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