



ASSESSMENT OF ENTRY LEVEL EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS OF FINAL YEAR SECONDARY SCHOOLS STUDENTS OF BUSINESS SUBJECTS IN ANAMBRA STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract

The need to empower students with skills for success in employment necessitated this study on assessment of entry level employability skills of final year secondary school business subject students in Anambra-North Senatorial District of Anambra State. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population was 1,145 students and a sample size of 458 was drawn using proportionate stratified random sampling technique. Data for the study were collected using a five-point rating scale questionnaire containing 18 items in two clusters. The instrument was validated by three experts, two in business education and one in measurement and evaluation from the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. A pilot study involving 20 students from Anambra-Central Senatorial District was conducted to ascertain the reliability of the instrument and analysis with Cronbach alpha yielded reliability coefficients of 0.71 and 0.93 for the two clusters with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.82. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions and determine the homogeneity or otherwise of the respondents' mean ratings while z-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed that students acquired communication and teamwork skills at a high extent while gender did not influence the respondents' mean ratings on their extent of acquisition of the assessed employability skills. Based on the findings, it was concluded that on graduation, the students are likely to secure and do well in employment since their business subjects teachers were very effective in equipping them with the skills. It was, therefore, recommended that school authority and government should encourage the teachers to continue with their efforts to help their products overcome the problem of unemployment. Also their counterparts in other parts of the country should emulate them to enhance the employability of secondary school leavers which is part of the major aims of teaching business subjects at that level of education.

Introduction

For more than four decades after independence, Nigeria operated a secondary school curriculum that was similar to what existed under the colonial masters. Indeed, It became clear, after independence, to many Nigerians that the colonial education offered in grammar schools was no longer suitable for equipping individuals to cope with the demands and problems of an emerging society. Consequently, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 1998) stated that the existing five years of secondary education will become six years divided into two sections of a three year Junior Secondary School (JSS) and a three year Senior Secondary School (SSS). In addition, the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2000) posited that the introduction of the junior secondary school phase would provide pupils with training for the world of work and further education. As a result of this, the secondary school curriculum content became academic, pre-vocational and vocational covering all



basic subjects that would enable students to acquire knowledge and develop their skills. The broad aims of secondary school education, according to the FRN (2004: 18) are the preparation of students for useful living in the society and the preparation of students for higher education.

At the junior secondary level, students offer business studies as a compulsory pre-vocational subject then at the senior secondary level, they are taught as distinct subjects including book-keeping and accounting, economics, commerce, shorthand, and typewriting. According to Esene (2004), the Comparative Education Study and Adaptation Centre (CESAC) listed the objectives of business studies as follows:

- To enable the students to acquire the basic knowledge of business studies.
- To prepare students for further training in business studies.
- To provide orientation and basic skills with which to start a life of work for those who may not undergo further training.
- To provide basic skills for personal use in the future, and
- To relate the knowledge and skills to the national economy (Esene, 2004:73).

Senior secondary business subjects are taught as vocational subjects because they are studied in depth in order to develop valuable knowledge, understanding, experiences and skills that will benefit the school leavers. The objectives are to expose students to a wide range of business activities, skills and good knowledge of the strategies for the nation's economic growth and sustainability. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2006), business subjects provide students with knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary to achieve success in the workplace, post-secondary education or training and daily life. They also provide students with a new practical content for many of the subjects they studied at the primary level including mathematics, science and technology, language and social studies. The knowledge of business subjects helps students to recognize their relevance as they are applied in the world of business.

The FRN (2004) proposed that people who necessarily must drop from school should have a reasonable acquaintance with vocational and business skills useful for engagement even at apprenticeship level or outright employment in line with Okwuanaso and Nwazor (2000). Business subjects consist of skill and non-skill subjects. The skill subjects are taught so that students can acquire and develop relevant entry level skills for employment while the non-skill subjects enable students to gain basic economic understanding of the world around them.

According to Rowley (2014), entry level is the point at which job seekers enter the job market with the minimum required training and education. Thus, in the broadest sense, entry level is the point between education and entrance into work experience. Rowley, therefore, defined entry level employability skills as the first or initial skills that a trainee or student is expected to possess upon completion of training or school programme. Employability skills are necessary for getting, keeping and being successful in a job. They are skills and attitudes that enable employees to get along with colleagues, make critical decisions, solve problems, develop respect and ultimately become strong ambassadors. As industries change, employers seek employees who are adaptable and have skills beyond technical knowledge (Deloza, 2013 & Wibrow, 2011).

Secondary school leavers need to acquire certain skills that will ensure their success in any environment whether they are going to work or enroll for further studies. While technical knowledge is important, employers and educational administrators seek skills that are useful and transferable from the classroom to job performance in employment. Such useful and transferrable skills required



for getting and being successful on a job are referred to as employability skills. Employability skills pertain to interpersonal qualities and character traits that define how people react in various situations and are relevant to entry level employment. Therefore, employees who possess these skills can adapt to various job roles because the skills are not job specific but cut horizontally across all industries and vertically across all jobs from entry level to chief executive officer (Robinson & Garton, 2008). Matters and Curtis (2008) outlined some entry level employability skills needed by the workforce which secondary school students are expected to acquire before graduation to include communication skills, teamwork skills, problem solving skills, planning and organizing skills and learning skills.

Zinser (2003) concluded that communication and interpersonal relations, teamwork, problem solving and learning skills are key elements of employability skills. Robinson and Garton (2008) noted that teamwork, communication and problem solving skills are some of the skills desired by most employers. Atkins (1999), however, posited that if every student emerges with the same repertoire of employability skills, any market advantages would disappear. The two employability skills covered in this study are communication skills and teamwork skills. According to Matters and Curtis (2008), communication skills contribute to productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers and teamwork skills contribute to productive working relationships and outcomes.

The acquisition of entry level employability skills provides opportunities for business subject students to succeed in employment. Robinson in Robinson and Garton (2008) agreed that students will not learn what is not assessed. Therefore, assessing of employability skills is unarguably the most effective way to ensure that they are acquired by students. Assessment pushes students to identify what skills they need to develop and how. It can stimulate skill development by helping students see their skill gaps and clarify what skills are critical to a given task. Assessment affects how students study and encourages them to take a deeper approach to a task rather than a surface approach.

According to Chukwugbo (2014), assessment is the systematic collection, review and use of information about educational programmes to improve students' learning. Marzano (2003) defined assessment as the process of collecting information which is conducted in order to improve educational programmes and demonstrate their effectiveness. Marzano further noted that assessment focuses on students' learning and developmental outcomes. Secondary school leavers who could not continue with further education are expected to enter the workforce with relevant employability skills that will sustain them as productive members in today's complex work environment (Rowley, 2014). The subjects used in this study are male and female SS III students offering business subjects such as economics, principles of accounting, typewriting and office practice among others.. It is possible that gender can have influence on students' level of acquisition of entry level employability skills. For instance, Jackson (2013) reported that gender effect was a factor on the extent of acquisition of employability skills by business students in West Australia. Therefore, the influence of gender in the views of the respondents was determined in the study.

Statement of the Problem

All students who study business subjects in the secondary schools may not immediately proceed with higher education on graduation and should be gainfully employed. Many of them, however, may not be aware of the specific entry level employability skills they need for the workplace and may not be adequately prepared to enter the workforce upon graduation. They may be under constant pressure to complete challenging subjects and participate in extra-curricular activities because of the enrollment demands of colleges and universities. Unfortunately, the focus given to



knowledge acquisition in academic subjects has contributed to negative attitude of students to skill subjects. In addition, schools have focused attention on improving acquisition of technical and basic skills without addressing the much needed employability skills (Rowley, 2014). Therefore, the problem of this study is that final year senior secondary school students do not seem to have known or acquired skills necessary to be successful in the workplace after graduation. If this anomaly is not suitably addressed, many secondary school leavers who could not immediately proceed for further education in tertiary institutions would be seriously handicapped by not being able to help themselves with small day-to-day needs or contribute to their families and the society. This study was, therefore, considered imperative as it will reveal the status of final year secondary schools business subject students in Anambra State relative to entry level employability skills to enable relevant stakeholders take objective remedial actions.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to assess the entry level employability skills of final year secondary school business subject students in Anambra State. Specifically, the study assessed Communication skills acquired by final year secondary school business subjects students in Anambra North Senatorial Zone of Anambra State.

Teamwork skills acquired by final year secondary school business subjects students in Anambra North Senatorial Zone of Anambra State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

To what extent are communication skills acquired by final year secondary school business subjects students in Anambra North Senatorial Zone of Anambra State?

To what extent are teamwork skills acquired by final year secondary school business subjects students in Anambra North Senatorial Zone of Anambra State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.5 level of significance:

Gender does not significantly influence the mean ratings of final year secondary school business subjects students in Anambra North Senatorial Zone of Anambra State on the extent they acquired communication skills.

Gender does not significantly influence the mean ratings of final year secondary school business subjects students in Anambra North Senatorial Zone of Anambra State on the extent they acquired teamwork skills.

Method

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. According to Nworgu (2006), descriptive survey is the one in which a group of people is studied by collecting and analyzing data from few people, considered to be representative of the entire group. Population of the study was all the 1,145 SS III business subject students in the 69 public secondary schools in Anambra North Senatorial Zone. SS III students were chosen because they were at the verge of finishing their secondary education programme and assumed to have been adequately exposed to these skills in the course of their study. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to draw a sample size of 458 students for the study. A structured questionnaire titled "Entry level employability skills



acquisition questionnaire (ELESAQ)” was used for data collection. The instrument has two main parts; A and B. Part A contained one item on gender of the respondents while Part B contained two clusters of B1 and B2 with 10 and eight items respectively on communication skills and teamwork skills. Part B was structured on a five-point scale of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Moderate Extent (ME), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE).

The instrument was validated by three experts, two in business education and one in measurement and evaluation from the Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. A pilot study involving 20 students from Anambra-Central Senatorial Zone was conducted to ascertain the reliability of the instrument and analysis with Cronbach alpha yielded reliability coefficients of 0.71 and 0.93 for the two clusters with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.82. The instrument was administered on the respondents personally by the researchers with the help of teachers in each school covered using on the spot completion and retrieval method to avoid loss but some who were not able to collect and return on the spot were later collected by their teachers. Out of 458 copies of the instrument distributed 449 (184 males and 265 females) representing 98.03 percent were correctly filled and used for analysis while nine copies, representing 1.9 percent were incorrectly filled and found unusable. Data collected were analyzed using the arithmetic mean to answer the research questions and standard deviation to determine the homogeneity or otherwise of the respondents' mean ratings while z-test inferential statistics was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Decision on the research questions was based on the cluster mean score relative to the real limits of numbers on a five-point scale. A null hypothesis was accepted where the calculated z-value was less than the z-critical value at 0.05 level of significance but rejected where the calculated z-value was equal to or greater than the z-critical value.

Results

Table 1: Respondents' mean ratings on their extent of acquisition of communication skills N=449

| S/N | Communication skills | Mean | SD | Remarks |
|-----|---|------|------|---------|
| | Ability to | | | |
| 1 | Listen attentively and understand oral instructions | 4.24 | 1.00 | HE |
| 2 | Speak clearly and directly | 4.30 | 0.78 | HE |
| 3 | Read and understand written communication | 4.63 | 0.61 | VHE |
| 4 | Give clear explanations | 4.17 | 0.81 | HE |
| 5 | Use numbers effectively | 4.17 | 0.89 | HE |
| 6 | Ask clear and correct questions | 4.06 | 0.99 | HE |
| 7 | Write assignments and reports properly | 4.40 | 0.74 | HE |
| 8 | Make oral presentation as part of class work | 4.11 | 0.89 | HE |
| 9 | Use social media for communication | 4.29 | 0.98 | HE |
| 10 | Answer questions correctly and clearly | 4.28 | 0.97 | HE |
| | Cluster Mean | 4.27 | | HE |

Table 1 shows that one out of the 10 communications skills listed has mean score of 4.63 showing that the students acquired it at a very high extent. The remaining nine skills have mean scores ranging between 4.06 and 4.40 indicating that the students acquired them at a high extent. The cluster

mean score of 4.27 shows that final year secondary school business subject students in Anambra North Senatorial Zone of Anambra State acquired communication skills at a high extent. The standard deviations for all the items are within the same range showing that the respondents are not wide apart in their mean ratings.

Table 2: Respondents' mean ratings on their extent of acquisition of teamwork N=449

| S/N | Teamwork skills | Mean | SD | Remarks |
|-----|--|------|------|---------|
| | Ability to | | | |
| 1 | Work as a member of a team | 4.20 | 1.07 | HE |
| 2 | Cooperate with class mates | 4.63 | 0.66 | VHE |
| 3 | Participate in group discussions | 4.38 | 0.47 | HE |
| 4 | Appreciate the strength of team members | 3.90 | 0.88 | HE |
| 5 | Contribute ideas in group work | 4.31 | 0.81 | HE |
| 6 | Get on well with people of different age and gender | 3.89 | 1.16 | HE |
| 7 | Define role as a member of a team | 4.20 | 0.88 | HE |
| 8 | Participate actively in group assignments and projects | 4.35 | 0.78 | HE |
| | Cluster mean | 4.23 | | HE |

Table 2 shows that one out of the eight teamwork skills has a mean score of 4.63. This means that the students acquired in at a very high extent. The rest have mean scores ranging between 3.89 and 4.38 indicating that the students acquired them at a high extent. The cluster mean score of 4.23 indicates that final year secondary school business subject students in Anambra North Senatorial Zone of Anambra State acquired teamwork skills at a high extent. Standard deviations for all the items are low showing that the respondents were homogenous in their ratings.

Table 3: Summary of z-test analysis of male and female final year business subjects students' mean rating on their extent acquisition of communication skills.

| Gender | N | Mean | SDa | df | z-cal | z-crit | Remarks |
|--------|-----|------|------|----------|-------|--------|---------|
| Male | 184 | 4.26 | 0.83 | | | | |
| | | | | 0.05 447 | 0.36 | 1.96 | NS |
| Female | 265 | 4.23 | 0.94 | | | | |

Table 3 shows that the calculated z-value of 0.36 is less than the critical z-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and 447 degree of freedom. This means that gender did not significantly influence the mean ratings of final year secondary school business subject students in Anambra North Senatorial Zone of Anambra State on the extent they acquired communication skills. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.



Table 4: Summary of z-test analysis of male and female final year business subjects students' mean rating on their extent of acquisition of teamwork skills

| Gender | N | Mean | SDa | df | z-cal | z-crit | Remarks |
|--------|-----|------|------|----------|-------|--------|---------|
| Male | 184 | 4.38 | 0.81 | 0.05 447 | 1.52 | 1.96 | NS |
| Female | 265 | 4.26 | 0.83 | | | | |

Table 4 shows that the calculated z-value of 1.52 is less than the critical z-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and 447 degree of freedom. This means that gender did not significantly influence the mean ratings of final year secondary school business subject students in Anambra North Senatorial Zone of Anambra State on the extent they acquired teamwork skills. Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed that the final year business subject students in Anambra-North Senatorial District acquired communication skills at a high extent. This finding is in contrast with the report of Deleon (1998) that secondary school students possessed communication skills at a moderate extent irrespective of gender. Deleon also noted that communication skills is the foundation on which curriculum is developed and delivered in the classroom and listed some strategies like direct observation, videotaping learner interactions, role play within groups and group work using available technologies for teaching them effectively in schools in order to enhance their acquisition by students. The findings also showed that gender did not have a significant influence in the mean ratings of the students on the extent they acquired communication skills. This finding agrees with the reports of Jackson (2013) and Rowley (2014) that male and female students agreed to have acquired communication skills in school and have perceived them to be very important for success in the workplace. This position is in agreement with Zinser (2003) and Robinson and Garton (2008) who indicated that communication skills is one of the entry level employability skills area perceived as most important for secondary school leavers. In a related view, Bosworth (2004) found out that employers and secondary school teachers rated listening as the most important communication skill secondary school graduates need to possess.

Findings of the study also revealed that final year business subject students in Anambra-North Senatorial District acquired teamwork skills at a high extent irrespective of gender. This finding is in agreement with Auwal (2013) who reported that secondary school graduates both male and female acquired teamwork skills and are competent in performing tasks requiring such skills. The finding also supports the view of Thompson (2011) who noted that gender did not influence acquisition of teamwork skills among secondary school graduates. Thompson also reported that some of the entry level applicants possessed teamwork skills. The finding is also in line with the views of Sloane (2014) and Bernhagen (2015) who asserted that secondary school students build their teamwork skills in or out of the classroom from completing group homework and projects, planning presentations and organizing a sport or party. The high extent of acquisition of teamwork skills as found in this study could be as a result of various classroom activities that encourage collaborative learning.



Conclusion

Based on the results of the study, it was concluded that final year secondary schools business subject students in Anambra-North Senatorial District of Anambra State are likely to secure and do well in employment since they acquired relevant entry level employability skills at a high extent.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

Authority of secondary schools in the area of study and government should encourage the teachers of business subjects to continue with their efforts to help their products overcome the problem of unemployment.

Teachers of business subjects in other parts of the state and country should emulate those in the area of the study in effectively inculcating employability skills in students for their future success.

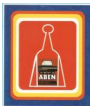
Government and secondary school administrations should give teachers autonomy to consciously and deliberately structure their classes in ways that support the acquisition of employability skills by students for their future well-being.

Employers of labour should collaborate with secondary schools to provide learning experiences that will foster students' acquisition of employability skills.

Policy makers at the federal and state levels should enact policies on the level at which secondary school leavers should possess employability skills to enable them earn a decent living.

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