

ASSESSMENT OF SOFT AND TECHNICAL SKILLS POSSESSED BY BUSINESS EDUCATION POSTGRADUATES FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**BY****Oluwasina, Boladale Ruth: Department of Business Education, Tai Solarin College of Education, Omu Ijebu, Ogun State****Onokpaunu, Michel Oghenekaro: Department of Technology and Vocational Education, Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka; E-mail: talk2michel231@yahoo.com****&****Odusanya, Abosede Abolanle: Department of Business Education, Tai Solarin College of Education, Omu Ijebu, Ogun State****Abstract**

The study concentrated on determining soft and technical skills possessed by business education postgraduates for national development in Nigeria. In order to execute this study, two research questions and four null hypotheses were raised. Descriptive survey research design was adopted and a sample population of 364 postgraduate business education students in public universities in South- West and South-South, Nigeria was selected using proportionate sampling technique. A 4-point questionnaire containing 22 items in two clusters was used for data collection. Internal consistency of the instrument was determined through a pilot test using Cronbach alpha which yielded reliability coefficients of 0.83 and 0.72. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings revealed that the subjects possessed soft and technical skills at a low extent while institution type and region did not significantly influence their rating. It was concluded that the poor teaching of practical workplace skills in business education programme could be responsible for the lack of soft and technical skills among business education graduates in South-West and South-South, Nigeria. It was recommended among others that business educators should incorporate effective instructional strategies and methods within and outside the classroom in order to impart the necessary soft and technical skills in students to enable them contribute effectively to national development.

Keywords: *Assessment, Soft skills, Technical skills and National development*

Introduction

The term, national development is anchored around three main schools of thought since the 1950s, namely; the economists, the sociologists and the seers. Economists like Bernstein, Shultz and Psacharapoulos interpreted national development primarily in terms of the economic prosperity of a nation based on an increase in its gross national product. From economists' narrative, national development is achieved through investing in human capital and raising the productivity capacities of societies (Thomas, Potter & Allen, 1992). Sociologists such as McClelland, Weber, Inkeles and Smith proposed that modernizing a country leads to national development and a modern society. With modernization as the main goal, emphasis is placed on education, technology and industrialization which are regarded as the key agents of national development. Lastly, the Seers did not emphasize on economic growth as the primary indicator of national development but focused more on the assessment of a human needs relative to freedom, equity, participation and empowerment to fulfil his or her potentials in the society.

However, Edeh (2015) opined that national development is realistically seen in a holistic phenomenon and multi-dimensional process, which is essentially man-oriented and not institutional- based. According to Lawal (2013), national development is an exploitation and utilization of both human and material resources to improve the lots of a nation. It involves the improvement of the social welfare of the people of the nation. Okereke (2016) defined national development as a process of integrating all sectors of the economy into development for increased production, improved standard of living, employment,

modernization of technology and industrialization. National development is therefore more than the provision of physical and economic infrastructure because it must improve the quality of life of the people in any society.

Education is widely recognized as a key agent of national development either as a way of developing human capacity, increasing skilled workforce for modernization or as a source of personal freedom and empowerment (Alam, 2008). Accordingly, Lawal (2013) recognised education as the cornerstone of national development and stressed that business education which is a subpart of vocational and technical education is perceived to be the greatest weapon that can be used to achieve national development. The unique instructional framework of business education entails the teaching of workplace and lifelong skills geared national development. According to Onyesom and Okolocha (2013), business education is the intellectual and vocational preparation of students for earning a living in the contemporary industrial and business environment. Business education is a form of vocational education aimed at developing learners 'competitiveness in teaching, paid work and self-employment ventures (Amoor, 2010).

Extensively, business education is that aspect of general education that prepares students for employment and advancement in a broad range of office occupations, accounting professions, marketing occupation, teaching profession and entrepreneurship (Onokpaunu, 2016). In a nutshell, Ugwoke (2011) posited that business education is a work focused, skill-based, result-oriented and technology-based educational programme that produces skilled workforce for a nation's development. Although, there is a high rate of unskilled graduates in Nigeria, business education, being a skill based course has the capacity of bridging the skills gap needed for nation development. This is why, Okereke (2016) asserted that a well-articulated business education programme will produce graduates with 21st century skills capable of contributing positively to national development because it is packaged to equip students with soft and technical skills to create a highly industrial Nigerian society. The acquisition of soft and technical skills will enable business education graduates become more useful and productive citizens of the society.

The term, soft skills or non-technical skills are interpersonal, cognitive and psychological skills necessary for the application of technical skills and knowledge on the job (Weber, Finley, Crawford, & Rivera, 2009). Soft skills are personality forces that characterize an organization's communication, success and career (Parsons, 2008). On the other hand, technical skills or hard skills are abilities learned through job training or formal and informal training (Litecky, Arnett, & Prabhakar, 2004). A cursory analysis of business education programme would show that one of its mandates is not only to satisfy the employment needs of employers of labour but also to equip students with self-employment skills to set up new business ventures upon graduation. In a nutshell, soft skills are people's skills used by employees to survive in any business environment while technical skills are operational skills limited to a particular job.

According to Jackson (2010), team work, communication, critical thinking and problem solving skills are some of the prominent soft skills needed by business education graduates. Correspondingly, Omotayo and Umoru (2015) identified technical skills which graduates of business education must possessed to include word processing skills, spreadsheets, database, electronic presentation, e-mail management, digital cameras, file management and windows explorer, video conferencing, manipulation of computer software and computer related storage devices. Thus, educational institutions running business education programme in Nigeria are expected to design practical learning experiences capable of facilitating the acquisition of soft and technical skills among students. Sadly, it is currently observed that the business education graduates are not making the expected impact in the world of work as many employers of labour consider them unemployable due to their inability to demonstrate relevant employability skills. The few that veered into self-employment seems incapacitated as their business ventures fold up within the first five years of business operations.

Undoubtedly, the contribution of business education graduates to national development depends on the extent to which they possess the fundamental soft and technical skills needed in the business world. Surprisingly from research works consulted, there seems to be paucity of empirical investigations on soft and technical skills possessed by business education graduates in South-South and South-West, Nigeria. It is with this background that this research study on assessment of soft and technical skills possessed by business education postgraduates for national development was deemed imperative.

Research Objectives

The main objective of the study is to determine the extent to which business education graduates pursuing postgraduate programme in South-South and South-West Nigerian universities possessed soft and technical skills needed for national development. Specifically, the study determined the extent at which:

1. Postgraduate business education students in South-South and South-West Nigerian universities possessed soft skills needed for national development.
2. Postgraduate business education graduates in South-South and South-West Nigerian universities possessed technical skills needed for national development.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do postgraduate business education students in South-South and South-West Nigerian universities possessed soft skills needed for national development?
2. To what extent do postgraduate business education students in South-South and South-West Nigerian universities possessed technical skills needed for national development?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- Ho₁: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of respondents in federal and state universities on the extent they possessed soft skills needed for national development.
- Ho₂: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of respondents in federal and state universities on the extent they possessed technical skills needed for national development.
- Ho₃: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of respondents in South-South and South-West Nigeria on the extent they possessed soft skills needed for national development.
- Ho₄: There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of respondents in South-South and South-West on the extent they possessed technical skills needed for national development.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised 520 postgraduate business education students in all public tertiary universities in South-South and South-West Nigeria out of which 364 was sampled using proportionate sampling technique. Instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Questionnaire on Soft and Technical Skills for National Development (QSTSND)". The questionnaire contained 22 items in two clusters according to the research questions on a 4-point rating scale of very great extent (VGE), great extent (GE) small extent (SE) and very small extent (VSE). Face validity of the instrument was determined by one expert in business education and another in measurement and evaluation from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. A pilot test was conducted to establish the reliability of the instrument by administering it to 20 postgraduate business education students in North-West Nigeria which were not part of the study and the data collected were analyzed with Cronbach Alpha to obtain reliability coefficients of 0.83 and 0.72 for the two sections of the instrument.

Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and determine the homogeneity or otherwise of the respondents' views. Decisions on the research questions were based on the cluster mean relative to the real limits of numbers, therefore a cluster mean of 0.50-

1.49 means that the skills were possessed at a very small extent, 1.50-2.49 means they are possessed at a small extent, 2.50- 3.49 means high extent and 3.50-4.00 means very high extent. The hypotheses were tested using t-test. Where the calculated t-value was less than the table t-value, the hypothesis was accepted but where the calculated t-value was equal to or greater than the table t-value, the hypothesis was rejected.

Results

Table 1: Respondents' mean ratings on the extent they possessed soft skills for national development

S/N	Soft skills needed for national development	X	SD	Remarks
1	Leadership skills	1.36	0.72	VSE
2	Official communication skills	1.72	0.81	SE
3	Decision making skills	1.87	0.79	SE
4	Problem solving skills	2.02	0.88	SE
5	Critical thinking skills	1.09	0.74	VSE
6	Risk-management skills	1.11	0.69	VSE
7	Global awareness skills	1.23	0.80	VSE
8	Self-management skills	3.37	0.76	HE
9	Inter-personal skills	2.20	0.67	SE
10	Conflict management skills	1.98	0.75	SE
11	Creativity skills	1.68	0.83	SE
Cluster Mean		1.78		SE

Data in Table 1 show that the respondents' possessed only one out of the 11 soft skills listed at a high extent with a mean rating of 3.37 and possessed the rest either at a small extent or very small extent with mean ratings ranging 1.11 to 2.20. The cluster mean of 1.78 shows that postgraduate business education students in South-South and South-West Nigeria possessed soft skills needed for national development at a small extent. Standard deviations for all the items are within the same range which shows that the respondents were homogeneous in their opinions.

Table 2: Respondents' mean ratings on the extent they possessed technical skills for national development

S/N	Technical skills needed for national development	X	SD	Remarks
1	Inventory management skills	1.85	0.62	SE
2	Computer programming skills	1.12	0.84	VSE
3	Quantitative skill	2.87	0.72	HE
4	Keyboarding skills	3.09	0.66	HE
5	Project management skills	1.98	0.86	SE
6	Computer security skills	1.04	0.81	VSE
7	Database management system skills	1.76	0.85	SE
8	Computer software installation skills	1.69	0.86	SE
9	E-commerce skills	2.17	0.81	SE
10	Computer maintenance skills	1.29	0.86	VSE
11	Reporting and presentation skills	3.47	0.83	HE
Cluster Mean		2.03		SE

Data in Table 2 show that respondents' possessed three out of the 11 technical skills listed at a high extent with mean ratings ranging from of 2.87 to 3.47 and possessed the rest at a small or very small extent with mean ratings ranging from 1.04 to 2.17. The cluster mean of 2.03 shows that postgraduate business education students in South-South and South-West Nigeria possessed technical skills needed for national development at a small extent. Standard deviations for all the items are within the same range which shows that the respondents were homogeneous in their opinions.

Table 3: t-test summary of mean ratings between respondents from federal universities and state universities on the extent they possess soft skills for national development

Institution ownership	N	X	SD	α	df	t-cal	t-tab	Decision
Federal universities	244	2.27	0.79	0.05	362	1.67	1.96	NS
State universities	120	2.12	0.85					

Table 3 shows that the calculated t-value of 1.67 is less than the table t-value of 1.96 ($1.67 < 1.96$) at 0.05 level of significance and 362 degree of freedom. This means that respondents from federal and state universities did not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent they possessed soft skills needed for national development. Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted

Table 4: t-test summary of mean ratings between respondents from federal universities and state universities on the extent they possessed technical skills for national development

Institution ownership	N	\bar{X}	SD	α	df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Federal universities	244	2.01	0.76	0.05	362	1.33	1.96	NS
State universities	120	1.89	0.89					

Data in Table 4 show that the calculated t-value of 1.33 is less than the table t-value of 1.96 ($1.33 < 1.96$) at 0.05 level of significance and 362 degree of freedom. This means that respondents from federal and state universities did not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent they possessed technical skills needed for national development. Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted

Table 5: t-test summary of mean ratings between respondents from South-South and those from South-West on the extent they possessed soft skills for national development

Region	N	\bar{X}	SD	α	df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
South-South	236	1.98	0.84	0.05	362	0.25	1.96	NS
South-West	128	1.76	0.78					

Data in Table 5 show that the calculated t-value of 0.25 is less than the table t-value of 1.96 ($0.25 < 1.96$) at 0.05 level of significance and 362 degree of freedom. This means that respondents from South-South and South-West regions did not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent they possessed soft skills needed for national development. Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted.

Table 6: t-test summary of comparison between the mean ratings of respondents from South-South and South-West regions on the extent they possessed technical skills for national development

Region	N	X	SD	α	df	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
South-South	236	2.07	0.69	0.05	362	0.31	1.96	NS
South-West	128	1.81	0.81					

Data in Table 6 show that the calculated t-value of 0.31 is less than the table t-value of 1.96 ($0.31 < 1.96$) at 0.05 level of significance and 362 degree of freedom. This means that respondents from South-South and South-West regions did not differ in their mean ratings on the extent they possessed technical skills needed for national development. Therefore, the hypothesis was accepted.

Discussion

Findings of the study revealed that postgraduate business education students in South-South and South-West, Nigeria possessed soft and technical skills for national development at a small extent. This finding is in consonance with that of Ayofe and Ajetola (2009) which reported that graduates fail to perform in the workplace because they lack soft skills and are ill-prepared to apply technical skills in the workplace. This finding agrees with the report of Imeokparia and Ediagbonya (2009) that business education graduates are not well equipped with the core soft and technical skills needed in the business world for national development.

Furthermore, it was found that institutional ownership and region did not significantly influence the respondents' mean ratings on the extent they possessed soft and technical skills for national development. This finding agrees with the study of Adebakin, Ajadi and Subai (2015) that an average Nigerian university graduate lacks decision-making, team-work, leadership and project management skills which ordinarily will aid their existence and survival within and outside work environments. The finding of this study that postgraduate business education students in federal and state universities either from South-South and South-West did not differ significantly on the extent they possessed soft and technical skills for national development agreed with Pitan and Adedeji (2012) which discovered that there was a disparity between the skills acquired by university graduates and the ones needed by employers of labour in Nigeria.

However, the finding is in contrast with the report of Akuegwu and Nwi-ue (2013) that graduating students in federal universities possessed soft and technical skills at a greater extent than their state university counterparts. The finding further contradicts the study of Bassey, Akuegwu, Umoren, Ekpiken, Egbona and Uche (2008) which revealed that graduating students in state universities had a higher possession of soft and technical skills than their federal counterparts.

Conclusion

Technical skills used to be the only skills needed for employment but today's workplace set-up is showing that technical skills are not enough to enable employees retain their jobs due to the shift from an industrial economy to an information society. Based on the findings of this study, the researchers concluded that the poor teaching of practical workplace skills in business education programme could be responsible for the lack of soft and technical skills among business education graduates in South-West and South-South, Nigeria. One can infer that, postgraduate business education students in South-South and South-West, Nigeria may have little knowledge on the different types of soft and technical skills needed for national development.

Recommendations

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

1. Business educators should incorporate effective instructional strategies and methods within and outside the classroom in order to impart the necessary soft and technical skills in students to enable them contribute effectively to national development.
2. Government and its agencies should vigorously re-structure the students' industrial work experience scheme (SIWES) to adequately expose business education students to relevant soft and technical skills needed in the business world for national development.
3. Business education curriculum developers should periodically review the curriculum with top employers of labour in order to design a skill-based programme tailored in line with global workplace standards.

References

- Adebakin, A.B, Ajadi, O.T., & Subair, S.T. (2015). Required and possessed university graduate employability skills: Perceptions of the Nigerian employers. *World Journal of Education*, 5(2), 115-121
- Akuegwu, B.A., & Nwi-ue, F.D. (2013). Appraisal of university students' possession of employment skills for global workplace in South-South, Nigeria. *Journal of Educational Review*, 6(3), 295 - 305
- Alam, G.M. (2008). The role of technical and vocational education in the national development of Bangladesh. *Asia Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 9(1), 25-44
- Amoor, S.S. (2010). The need to improve teacher quality in business education in Nigerian universities. *International Journal of Education Research*, 1(1), 1-11
- Ayofe, A.N., & Ajetola, A.R. (2009). Exploration of the gap between computer science curriculum and industrial I.T skills requirement. *International Journal of Computer Science and Information Security*, 4(1), 23 - 31
- Bassey, U. U., Akuegwu B. A., Umoren, G.U., Ekpiken, W.E., Egbona, A.E. & Uche, K.K. (2008). University administrators' provision for entrepreneurial studies in Nigeria: Implications for employment promotion. *South African Journal of Education Leadership and Management*, 1(1), 35-51
- Ebeh, J. I. (2015). National security and national development: A critique. *Indexed African Journals Online*, 4(2), 1 – 14
- Imeokparia, P.O, & Ediagbonya K (2009). Utilization of teaching aids in teaching and learning of business education in Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Edo State. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Intellectualism*, 2(2), 12-15
- Jackson, D. (2010). An international profile of industry-relevant competencies and skill gaps in modern graduates. *International Journal of Management Education*, 8(3), 29-58
- Lawal, A.W. (2013). Technical and vocational education: A tool for national development in Nigeria *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(8), 85 – 89
- Litecky, C. R., Arnett, K. P., & Prabhakar, B. (2004). The paradox of soft skills versus technical skills in is hiring. *Journal of Computer Information Systems*, 45(1), 69-76
- Okereke, C.E. (2016). Global tools for national development in business education. *Nigeria. International Journal of Academic Research* 13(1), 1 – 6
- Omotayo, D. A., & Umoru, T.A. (2015). The use of information and communication technology for the enhancement of teaching and learning of business subjects in secondary schools. *Business Education Book of Conference Proceedings*, 2(1), 230 – 240.
- Onokpaunu, M.O. (2016). *Analysis of web-based instructional technologies for use by business education lecturers in tertiary institutions in Delta State*. Unpublished master's thesis, Department of Technology and Vocational Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State.
- Onyesom, M., & Okolocha, C.C. (2013). Assessment of the adequacy of instructional resources in business education programmes relative to NCCE standards for colleges of education in Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 2(2), 1 - 14.

- Pitan, O.S., & Adedeji, S.O. (2012). Skills mismatch among university graduates in the Nigeria labour market. *US-China Education Review*, 1(1), 90-98
- Thomas, A., Potter, D., & Allen, T. (1992). *Development, capitalism and the nation state: Poverty and development in the 1990s*. Milton, Keynes: Open University Press.
- Ugwoke, E.O. (2011). Effective utilization of ICT for repositioning business education programme in tertiary institutions in Nigeria for national development. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 11(1), 202 – 214
- Weber, M. R., Finley, D. A., Crawford, A., & Rivera, D. (2009). An exploratory study identifying soft skill competencies in entry-level managers. *Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 9(4), 353- 361