

THE PERCEPTIONS OF EMPLOYERS TOWARDS EMPLOYABILITY OF BUSINESS EDUCATION GRADUATE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Students' interest is more likely to be maintained if they can see the relevance of their studies to their future career. Life beyond university/College inspired this study to investigate the employers' perceptions towards the employability of business education graduates in Nigeria. The research design was survey, based on the study's objectives. Two research questions guided this study. Questionnaire was used to collect the data and descriptive research was used to provide careful descriptions of a phenomenon to generate an accurate description of an event. The internal consistency reliability for the instrument using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha was estimated to be $\alpha = 0.94$. Therefore, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to organize, analyze, and interpret the data. The result shows that educators and employers believed that the government especially Ministry of Education, had not allocated adequate funds to upgrade and expand business education programs. Also, inadequate facilities and resources inhibited efforts to maintain high quality standards for business education programs. The study recommends among others that the government should seek employers' and private sector's involvement in financing and business education programs. To improve vocational education, emphasis should be laid on establishing and maintaining quality standards like entrance requirements, teachers' certification, accreditation, and standardized assessment for business education programs.

Keywords: Business education, Employers, Employability and Nigeria

Introduction

The economic competitiveness of a country depends on the skills of its work force. The skills and competencies of the work force, in turn, are dependent upon the quality of the country's education and training systems. Business education is perceived as one of the crucial elements in enhancing economic productivity while employability is a set of achievements, skills and personal attributes that help graduates to obtain employment and remain successful in their occupations (Mobley, 1998). According to Middleton, Zidman and Adams (1993), employers assume graduates to have skills and personal attributes such as: team-work, communication, leadership, critical thinking, problem solving and managerial abilities. A graduate's job is not guaranteed unless skills and personal attributes possessed by the graduate are successfully used in the job (McCabe, 2010). In this respect, it is important to point out that employer's requirements for graduates' employability varies according to the economic sector and across countries.

The relationship between quality of skills possessed by business education graduates and the job market has been the focus of growing theoretical and empirical investigations in the education literature but the central issue in this study is to examine employers' perceptions about the quality of business education graduates in terms of their hard skills and soft skills. Some related studies reviewed revealed that employers place great emphasis on graduates' soft skills, and their ability to deal empathetically and effectively with job's demands. It is widely known that hard skills are necessary to get a job but often insufficient to keep it. Soft skills assist graduates in progressing and

maintaining their jobs. Yet, some employers are not fully satisfied with the quality of business education graduates. Hence, academics and educational authorities need to work closely with employers to ensure that business education graduates possess skills that satisfy the market's needs. It is; therefore, of paramount importance to explore the main factors that employers expect business education graduates to possess to enhance their employability chances.

The employers' views of how well business education graduates are prepared for the workplace have received widespread attention in the education literature and continued to be a commonly debated theme. Most of these researches have been conducted in various places. The following section offers a brief review of these studies. Mustapha (1999) conducted a comparative evaluation of how the public and private sector employers perceive the employability of universities' graduates. The researcher found that there are significant differences in the perception and rating of the quality and employability of the graduates by the public and private sectors. He observed that whilst the private sector employers consider graduates of Nigeria Universities as high quality; the public sector employers rated the graduates as low quality. Mustapha concluded that curriculum should be reviewed to suit the country's various industries' needs. Imeokparia and Kennedy (2012) noticed that thinking skills of business graduates are not as high as that of personal quality skill and concluded that the current level of skills possessed by Business graduates is satisfactory to secure placement in the work world. Andrews and Higson (2008) explored employer perspectives of business graduate employability in four European countries (UK, Austria, Slovenia and Romania). They found that there are notable similarities in employer perspectives of what may be termed 'core components' of business graduate employability. The core components include the value of hard business-related knowledge and skills, the importance of soft business-related skills and competencies, and the need for prior work-experience.

The concepts of business education are based on a vision and a set of competencies designed to prepare students to become knowledgeable and ethical decision makers as they fulfill their roles as consumers, workers, good citizens and also contribute to the development of this "renaissance" worker. An education for and about business offers students the opportunity to master the fundamental knowledge and skills needed to succeed in business and more importantly, an equal opportunity to succeed in life.

In classrooms nationwide, business educators play a prominent role in preparing students to become responsible citizens, capable of making the astute economic decisions that will benefit their personal and professional lives. Using the concepts described above, business teachers introduce students to the basics of personal finance, the decision-making techniques needed to be wise consumers, the economic principles of an increasingly international marketplace, and the processes by which businesses operate. Business Education is one of the occupation area that are richly provided by vocational and technical education in Nigeria. Business Education refers to a program of instruction that offer various skills in accounting, marketing and Office Technology and Management (OTM). Major topics include office practice, bookkeeping, business mathematics, business communications, secretarial duties, word processing and advertising (Ajisafe, Bolarinwa and Ede 2015). Edokpolor and Egbiri (2017), stipulated that actual goals of business education shall be to:

- i) Prepare students for specific career in office occupation
- ii) Equip students the requisite skills for job creation on Entrepreneurship;
- iii) Expose students to knowledge about business including a good blend of computer technology which incorporate information and communication technology (ICT)

Business education plays a significant role in Nigeria's economic growth and development. It improves personal quality and build the attitude of individual that necessary to personal and employment situation, provide knowledge, skill and competent for an individual to function well in office operation. It also create jobs for themselves and others (Amoor and Udoh 2008).

Issues and Challenges of Business Education in Nigeria

Education in Nigeria, (business education inclusive) has gone below its expectations. The system has derailed from its original intentions because the learning conditions are deteriorating, classrooms are overcrowded, laboratories lack the basic equipment, libraries are nothing but a collection of obsolete materials, incessant strike actions and students' unrest. All these have contributed to a precipitous fall in the standard and quality of education in Nigeria. Apart from these seemingly deficiencies in the sector, there is an attitudinal failure on the part of all stakeholders. However, this situation in the education sector is not irreversible only if there is a positive attitudinal change by all stakeholders (Babalola 2007).

Also, the rapid technological changes in the 21st century posses challenges to education and employment sectors. The new labor market demands have caused many graduates with various certificates to be unemployed. The massive rate of unemployment and the changing face of the economic, social, political, labor market worldwide have led to new education reforms/policies with emphasis on business education geared towards helping the youths and adults to be self-dependent (Babalola and Tiarniyu 2012).

Despite the profound benefits of business education, it is still not fully blown in Nigeria. The problems that hinder the development of business education in Nigeria are rampant political and bureaucratic corruption together with the absence of social consensus on importance macroeconomic policy that will help business education on skills development training for rural and urban youths in the informal economy. There is no gain saying the fact that business education, an aspect of vocational education, is what Nigeria needs most now to help her solve most of her social, economic and developmental problems.

Statement of the Problems

The rising unemployment rate in Nigeria is getting to an alarming stage. Business Education which was considered in few decades ago as lucrative is not left out in the menace. Business Education program has been engulfed by technology, thereby creating gap between institution and industry. This has led to many Business Education graduates roaming about the streets without securing reasonable jobs. The Nigeria policy on education made it clear on the need for functional, relevant, practical and acquisition of appropriate skills and development of competencies as equipment for the individuals to live in and contribute to the development of his/her society. Now that there is economic recession in Nigeria and we need a tool for addressing the economic, political, and social crises that are threatening the political and economic stability of the nations, rising unemployment, lack of skilled workers, high dropout rates, and the changing demographic nature of the work force which has placed the issue of workforce education high on the educational reform agenda; then there is need to investigate the employers' perceptions towards the employability of business education graduates in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this research work is to investigate into the perceptions of the Employers towards employability of business education graduates in Nigeria. Specifically, the study aim at :

- i) Examining the perceptions of employers towards employability of business education graduates .
- ii) Determining the extent to which government responsiveness to the needs of business education programs contribute to the economic development in Nigeria.

The Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of employers regarding the employability of graduates of business education programs?
2. To what extent does government's responsiveness to the needs of business education programs to contribute to the economic development of Nigeria?

Theoretical framework

Human capital theory provides a framework for examining the impact of acquired variables such as education, learning and experience on career outcomes and it was further developed on the assumption that education can serve as a key determinant of decision choice and providing benefit to specific ventures (Babalola, 2007). Business education is oriented towards different ways of realizing opportunities. This is what makes Business education to provide students with the knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage youth to be self-employed and self-oriented. To inculcate the spirit of perseverance in the youths and adults which will enable them to persist in any business venture they embark on and to create smooth transition from traditional to a modern industrial economy, business education programme must be adequately implemented.

Concept of Employability

Producing employable graduates, forms part of the process of educating that encompasses the full educational spectrum of values from imparting knowledge and understanding to developing skills and attributes. Employability skills is a set of skills, understandings and personal attributes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Babalola 2017). It is a group of essential abilities that involve the development of a knowledge base, expertise level and mindset that is increasingly necessary for success in the modern workplace. In many sectors, recruiters are looking for 'work-ready' graduates with clear evidence of job specific skills in addition to high level graduate attributes. One of the main reasons students choose to study at university/College is to enhance their career prospects. Students, who make an effort to fully participate in the total student experience (academic, co-curricular, extra-curricular, including work experience) benefit from a well-rounded education, contribute fully to the life of the University and community and hopefully have fun in the process.

Employability plays an important role in the implementation of the colleges' Learning and Teaching Strategies. It is part of good learning practice. Students who engage in developing their employability are likely to be independent, reflective and responsible learners. Innovative learning,

teaching and assessment methods which promote students' understanding and help them to engage in 'deep' learning will also enhance their employability.

Methods

This study investigated the employers' perceptions towards the employability of business education graduates in Nigeria. The research design was a survey. The instrument contained five-point Likert-scale items. The following scale ranges will construct as: 4.50 - 5.00 Strongly Agree; 3.50 - 4.49 Agree; 2.50 - 3.49 Uncertain; 1.50 - 2.49 Disagree; and 1.00 - 1.49 strongly Disagree. The internal consistency reliability for the instrument using Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha was estimate to be $\alpha = 0.94$. Therefore, the final version of the instrument considered the adequate degree of content and face validity and internal consistency reliability. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to organize, analyze, and interpret the data as frequencies, percentages, rank-orders, means, and standard deviations.

Results

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions of employers regarding the employability of graduates of business education programs?

Table : Factors that inhibit the employers regarding the employability of business education graduates

S/N	Item	Employers	
		M(ME)	SD
1.	The government is committed to restructure business education programs to meet the needs of Nigeria's industrialization.	3.68(.22)	.80
2.	The government provides a clear direction regarding how to initiate partnerships or collaboration between business education institutions and industries.	3.04(.30)	1.09
3.	The technical content of business education curriculum is based on the needs in the labor market.	3.43(.23)	.82
4.	The structure of business education is becoming more flexible in responding to the changing labor market.	3.52(.17)	.63
5.	Public business education institutions would achieve greater efficiency and productivity if managed like business enterprises.	4.11(.26)	.93

Note. (ME) is the margin of error at the 95% confidence level.

The data 5 in Table 1 identified the factors that inhibit the restructuring of business education programs to serve the needs of the labor force. On item 1, it shows that employers (M=3.68, SD=.80) agreed that government is committed to restructuring business education programs. With respect to business and school partnerships (item 2), which is (M=3.04, SD=1.09) unsure about the government's initiatives to link business education institutions with business and industry. The standard deviations for items 1 and 2 were relatively large, indicating that the responses were

dispersed. In terms of the relevancy of the business education curriculum to the needs of the labor market (item 3), ($M=3.43$, $SD=.82$) were uncertain about its relevance. On item 4, ($M=3.52$, $SD=.63$) the employers agreed that the structure of business education has become more flexible. Interestingly, employers in item 5, ($M=4.11$, $SD=.93$) agreed that public business education institutions would achieve greater efficiency if they were managed similar to businesses. The margins of error for items 1- 5 ranged from .17 to .30 for employers. Overall, the employers agreed with regard to the role of government in restructuring business education programs to serve the needs of the labor force.

Research Question 2

To what extent does government's responsiveness to the needs of business education programs to contribute to the economic development of Nigeria?

Table 2: Government's responsiveness to the needs of vocational education and training

S/N	Item	Employers	
		M(ME)	SD
1.	The government responsive to the needs of business education programs to meet up the need of industrialization in Nigeria.	3.55(.19)	.70
2.	The government's policy focused on expanding business education programs.	3.57(.17)	.60
3.	The government allocates sufficient funding to upgrade and expand business education programs?	3.34(.18)	.68
4.	The government provides adequate facilities, equipment and resources to business education institutions.	3.21(.19)	.69
5.	The government is committed to maintaining the high quality standards of business education programs.	3.26(.24)	.86

Note. (ME) is the margin of error at the 95% confidence level.

Table 2 addressed illustrates the means, margins of error, and standard deviations for items 1- 5, which addressed the second research question: Regarding item 1, the employers ($M=3.55$, $SD=.70$) agreed that the government is responsive to the needs of business education programs. On item 2 also, employers ($M=3.57$, $SD=.60$) agreed that the government's policy was focusing on the expansion of business education programs. With respect to public funding (item 3), employers ($M=3.34$, $SD=.68$) were uncertain. Regarding the provision of adequate facilities and resources for business education institutions (item 4), employers ($M=3.21$, $SD=.69$) were less certain. For item 5, the employers ($M=3.26$, $SD=.86$) were uncertain. Large standard deviations for both groups suggest a relatively large variability of responses. The margins of error for items 1 through 5 ranged from .15 to .24 for employers. The overall indicates that the employers agreed that the government was responsive to the needs of business education programs in Nigeria.

Conclusions

The results reveal that the employers believed that business education programs in Nigeria contributed to the economic development of Nigeria and believed that a substantial financial investment in business education programs in Nigeria is justified. Further, they believed that business education programs were more appropriate than academic programs for developing new skills and the ability to use contemporary technologies. This implies that the government and private sector should invest in business education programs in Nigeria.

Furthermore, employers perceived that business education curricula had questionable relevance to the contemporary needs of business and industry. Employers' participation in school-business partnerships was minimal. This suggests that business education institutions should conduct continuous needs assessments to create relevant curriculum. Governmental agencies should also initiate outreach programs to establish school-business partnerships and collaboration with the private sector.

In general, employers were not aware of government initiatives to seek input from business and industry. The implication is that government and its agencies need to be more proactive rather than reactive in responding to human resource needs. This can be accomplished by eliciting input from business and industry and creating meaningful partnerships with the private sector. Employers also believed that the government's Ministry of Education, in particular, had not allocated adequate funds to upgrade and expand vocational programs. Similarly, inadequate facilities and resources inhibited efforts to maintain high quality standards for business education programs in Nigeria. With limited financial resources, government must identify alternatives to encourage the private sector to invest in upgrading business education programs in Nigeria. The issue of quality and standards is another area that needs to be addressed. In this study, employers indicated that to improve vocational education, emphasis should be focused on establishing and maintaining quality standards for business education programs in Nigeria. Quality standards include entrance requirements, teacher certification, accreditation, and standardized assessment.

Recommendations

Based on the results and limitations of this study, several recommendations for policy and practice, are offered:

1. The government should work collaboratively with the private sector to maintain and expand business education programs in Nigeria. In particular, the government should draw upon the resources of employers and solicit private sector investment in business education programs; Federal, state, and local agencies should provide a clear vision and mission for business education programs in Nigeria.
2. The government should provide effective leadership and incentives to the private sector to encourage partnerships and collaboration with business education institutions; A balanced approach should be emphasized in the school curriculum through the integration of technical, employability, and generalizable skills in business education programs. In addition, business education curricula should be flexible and responsive to the present and future needs of the nation.

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