



**BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAMS CURRICULUM CONTENTS
AND ACQUISITION OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS
AMONG GRADUATES OF UNIVERSITIES
IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA**

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Abstract:

This study examined business education programs curriculum contents and acquisition of employability skills among graduates of universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. To achieve the purpose of this study, two research hypotheses were formulated as guide for the study. Literature was reviewed in line with the variables under study. Survey research design was adopted. The population for the study was 987 business education graduates between 2007/2008 and 2014/2015 academic sessions from the University of Calabar (UNICAL) and Cross River University of Technology (CRUTECH). The sample of the study was 200 business education graduates drawn purposively using accidental and snowballing sampling techniques. A validated researcher made-four point scale questionnaire titled "Business Education Programs Curriculum Content and Acquisition of Employability Skills Questionnaire" (BEPCCAESQ) was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by four research experts. A reliability estimate ranging from .70 to .82 was achieved for the instrument using Chronbach Alpha reliability coefficient after a pilot test. The data obtained from the field was converted into values and analyzed using population t-test and one way analysis of variance (ANOVA). All the hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance. Findings revealed among others that the level of employability skills acquisition among universities business education graduates is significantly low. Consequently, it was recommended that the National Universities Commission (NUC) should urgently embark on an inclusive curriculum reform that incorporate business education teachers/lecturers, curriculum planners and developers as well as industry experts. This if done will provide the opportunity of appraising the in-use business education programs curriculum with a view of spotting inherent weaknesses in terms of contents, pedagogy and relevance to the world of work.

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1. Introduction

University is said to be an institution of higher learning and one of the citadels where tertiary education is offered. One of the goals of education at this level according to the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) is the development of the individual to be self-reliant and useful member of the society through the acquisition of both physical and intellectual skills. These skills when acquired would make learners employable. Yet many graduates of Nigerian universities cannot find work leading to an intractable problem of growing joblessness, and raises question as to whether functional education is really the pursuit in universities. This situation possess enormous challenge, and a serious responsibility on the university as an institution in that year in, year out there exist a steady increase in the number of applicants seeking and securing admissions into it with a belief in gaining employment after graduation.

Unarguably, universities turn out large chunk of graduates into the labour market annually either to secure employment or provide one. The uncomfortable truth, however, is that university seem to have failed in her avowed mandate of addressing the future of her graduates. The scenario that typifies this is that those skills that employers seek in employees seem scarcely taught in the universities. Essentially, graduate recruiters expect these recruits to be technically inclined and generally versed in their choice fields because there is a correlation between hiring a graduate and his or her acquisition of employability skills. These skills can be referred to as “work readiness” or “soft skills”. Simply put, it is the acquisition of skills, knowledge, attitude and commercial acumen that purports to empower fresh graduates to add productive and informed contributions to the attainment of organizational objectives immediately after employment (Singh & Singh, 2008). Department of Education Science and Training (DEST, 2002) and Omar, Baker and Rashid (2012) maintained that these skills are required not only to secure employment, but also to advance within an enterprise in a way that one can achieve his or her potential and contribute meaningfully to an entity’s strategic direction. The acquisition of these skills according to Mike (2014) brings with it such benefits as being self-employed, ability to create diverse job opportunities, as well as reduction in crime rate among other benefits.

Undisputedly, failure to acquire these skills or poorly acquiring them has over the years made universities graduates to become unemployed, and for those seen as employed, they are at best underemployed and paid pittance in comparison with what they would have deservedly earned. The continuous lack of acquiring these skills made Ekpenyong (1988) to tag the universities products as half-baked and unusable unless they are further trained. Trailing the root cause of this behemoth, Adebakin, Ajadi and Subair (2015) asserted that there is a mismatch between the education and training received from the universities and the expectations of the employers. Munishi (2016) ascribed the ill-competence of the universities graduates on the job to poor educational

training at primary and secondary levels triggered by many factors including ineffective curriculum.

Whilst in the universities, these students are being taught and one of the prominent programs of study is Business Education. As Aquah (2014) puts it, business education came to limelight and accorded prominence status by the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1977 when the National Policy on Education was enacted. This program of study aims at equipping the learners with employability skills and knowledge which would embolden them to create, secure, or stay on the job as well as grow in it. Although this program is offered across all educational levels, the government purpose in providing it is to prepare students for entry level jobs in occupations not requiring post-secondary training (FRN, 2004). This being true, those who proceed further to acquire university business education training should have a broader, well-equipped, functional and productive know-how of not just becoming employed, but employers themselves.

Tearfully, the programs have been implemented for more than three decades now, yet universities graduates of business education extraction are still stridently plagued with biting unemployment syndrome despite the laudable prospects of this promising aspect of education. Amidst this, universities in Nigeria keep producing too many liberal arts and theoretical business education graduates whose employability potentials look blurred. Those who are said to be employed at all are found to be unskilled, clueless, and incompetent in discharging their assigned duties. This observation aligns with Akuegwu and Nwi-ue (2013) that universities graduating students possession of employability skills is significantly low. Abaribe (2002) also corroborated this discouraging outcome when he reported on a World Bank assisted study that in various establishments where graduates of Nigerian universities (including those of business education) are employed, these graduates are consistently incapable of performing to the admiration of recruiters because they lack employability skills. The reasons for this may be unconnected with the absence of employment opportunities, rather, the paucity of employability skills acquisition. It is therefore strongly disturbing to witness graduates of a skillfully endowed program like business education joining the band wagon of those christen “unemployed” when a well-articulated program of this magnitude with options in Accounting, Management, Marketing and Office Technology and Management (OTM) holds employment prospects for her graduates in sectors such as, but not limited to education, financial, industrial, manufacturing, distribution, managerial settings as well as Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Scope wise, this paper covers the first three mentioned options except Office Technology and Management (OTM) because the two universities sampled in this study offers only those trio.

Accounting education, for example, involves the teaching of skills, attitudes, competences and knowledge necessary to secure and pursue a successful teaching, business and/or accounting career. Osuala (2009) opined that accounting education serves as character modifier, trainer and brightener of the innate abilities of those willing to attain economic independence and self-actualization. On their part, Ekwe and

Abuka (2014) sees it as that aspect of study poised to impact the learners with the needed knowledge, skills, attitude and competences necessary for ready employment. Traditionally, the primary objectives of accounting education curriculum serve to train the Nigerian students for employment within a range of career which include but not restricted to purchasing clerks, book keepers, payroll clerks, audit clerks, cashiering and business teachers involved in teaching accounting and allied subjects (Ezeani, 2012; Udo, 2014). Nowadays, the rationale for the study of accounting education in the universities is broadened and calls for the integration of a package of instructional programs tailored to educate and impart graduates to become intellectually versatile and adaptable to myriads of roles in which they may be called upon to perform in employment (Anao, 2009). All these may be imbibed after students have been exposed to the curriculum that holds the following contents as spelt out in the National Universities Commission Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard (NUC BMAS, 2007): elements of accounting, introduction to financial accounting, principles of business finance, introduction to cost accounting, managerial accounting, taxation, financial management, fundamentals of government accounting alongside other general and core educational courses.

In a study conducted by Ezeani (2012) on teachers and skills acquisition at business education from the perspective of accounting skills, it was discovered that universities business education curriculum content is bookish. Advisably, Romanus and Arowoshegbe (2014) after carrying out a study on the challenges of accounting education: the Nigerian experience, enunciated the dire need for the programs curriculum to be enhanced if it must churn out products with portfolio of skills such as interpersonal, communication, intellectual and so on. In New Zealand on the other hand, Biu and Porter (2010) quipped that accounting graduates who possess great depth of analytical, critical and thinking skill, oral exhibition and writing skills are highly valued.

Management education on the other hand is a two-fold course of study offered as an option in business education program. It combines “management” and “education” disciplines. Considering them separately, one would not be wrong to assert that one of the most important and demanding activity in any organization be it public or private is management insofar as there are predetermined aims and objectives to be achieved. The amalgam of these two concepts produces Management Education.

The university management education curriculum content set out in the NUC BMAS (2007) prescribes the teaching and learning of administrative office management, economics of production, organizational behavior, small scale business management, human relations, human resources management, business organization and administration of business education as core courses alongside general courses and others in education. This in-use curriculum contents is expected to implant in the graduates’ employability skills. Thus, graduates of management education employed in schools earned the onerous responsibility of discharging managerial functions which includes management of infrastructure and facilities, classroom management, management of staff, equipment management, open space management, supplies

management and financial resources management. Those employed in organizations other than schools could be involved in production management, distribution management and personnel management (Osuala, 2009). Other areas are procurement management, sales management, inventory management, event management, marketing management and so on. However, in Cambodia, the World Bank (2012) opined that graduates lacked analytical skills. Furthermore, it was made known that only an infinitesimal proportion of Cambodian graduates possess employability skills (CAMBFEB, 2008). In Nigeria, Aluko (2014) found that employers-higher education institutions partnerships that would have help develop the acquisition of employability skills in the learners appear people dependent rather than system dependent, in that the linkage tends to fizzle out at the exist of a particular initiator.

Marketing education is a program of pedagogy in marketing mercantilism and management concerned with training for the purpose of updating, upgrading, career development and operational management (Osuala, 2009). Ehiameyalar in Ben (2010) diagrammatically classified marketing education as one of the executive options in business education with a scintillating prospect for its graduates. Upon graduation, it is probable that graduates of this option of study can be employed to occupy teaching and leadership positions in secondary schools, technical colleges, tertiary institutions and other business oriented outfits. Besides, they may be employed in ministries, agencies and parastatals of the public service including industries, banks, or float their own businesses. Mayo in Osuala (2009) articulated that employments are also opened in relevant areas like advertising services, automobile sales and sales supporting occupations, finance and credit, food distribution, hotel and catering services, petroleum distribution, transportation occupation, retail trade and wholesale occupation to absorb graduates. To attain this aspiration, the NUC BMAS (2007) detailed the core marketing education courses to be offered by the students as principles of marketing, Nigerian marketing system and commercial policy, consumer education, principles of advertising, retail and wholesale as well as sales management. In addition, students of marketing education also offer core education courses that complement, nurture and ground them with not only marketing prowess, but the art of teaching.

The vivid description of Idaka and Uzoechi (2016) called to mind the skills that ought to be developed in graduates of marketing education such that could make them employable. These skills are communication, teamwork, problem solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organization, self-management, decision making and computer skills. In a review of marketing curriculum, Dacko (2006) disclosed that of the over two hundred business school curriculum studied, only a paltry number of them offered skill courses covering specific skills like communication and sales. Wellman (2010) in a study on employability skill requirement revealed that of the 250 marketing professional job adverts in 2009, half of the adverts emphasized the need for the acquisition of employability skills.

Therefore, in the face of the ever-demanding employability skills acquisition by graduates' hirers, what influence does the present business education programs'

curriculum contents exert on its accounting, management and marketing options graduates in terms of acquiring communication, problem solving, numeracy, critical thinking, teamwork, decision making, and IT/computer skills? Others include planning and organization, continuous learning and self-management skills. The quest to answering this poser underscore why the researcher embark on this study.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to examine business education programs curriculum content and acquisition of employability skill among graduates of universities in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to ascertain:

- 1) The level of employability skill acquisition among universities graduates of business education exposed to the programs' curriculum contents.
- 2) The influence of business education curriculum contents on the acquisition of employability skills among graduates of universities based on the different options of Accounting, Management and Marketing.

1.2 Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided the study:

- 1) The level of employability skill acquisition among universities graduates of business education exposed to the programs curriculum content is significantly low.
- 2) Business education programs' curriculum contents has no significant influence on the acquisition of employability skills among graduates of universities based on the different options of Accounting, Management and Marketing.

2. Methodology

The study adopted survey research design involving the use of questionnaire. Two research hypotheses guided the study. The study area was Cross River State, one of the states in Nigeria's South-South geo-political region. The population for the study was 987 business education graduates between 2007/2008 and 2014/2015 academic sessions from UNICAL and CRUTECH. Of this number, 200 was purposively drawn as sample using accidental and snowballing techniques. This is shown in Table 1. A four-point scale structured questionnaire validated by four research experts from the two institutions was used to elicit responses from the respondents. The reliability estimate ranging from .70 to .82 was achieved for the instrument using Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient after a pilot test. The instrument was administered personally by the researchers with the help of three research assistants. This was done after relevant information about the problem being researched was explained to the respondents. Population t-test and one way ANOVA was used to test all the hypotheses at .05 level of significance.

Table 1: Population distribution and sample of the study

S/n	Institution	Options	Population	Sample
1	UNICAL	Accounting	96	20
		Management	142	29
		Marketing	52	10
2	CRUTECH	Accounting	296	61
		Management	402	82
		Total	987	200

3. Results

Hypothesis one: The level of employability skill acquisition among universities graduates of business education exposed to the programs' curriculum content is significantly low.

Test for significance was done using population t-test at .05 level of significance. A summary of the result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Population t-test analysis of the level of employability skills acquisition among universities business education graduates exposed to the programs' curriculum content (N=200)

Sub-components	Observed Mean \bar{X}	Assumed Mean μ	S.D.	t-value
Communication Skill	20.98	17.50	5.13	13.57*
Problem solving skill	22.17	17.50	4.92	18.98*
Numeracy Skill	23.01	17.50	5.18	21.27*
Critical thinking Skill	22.63	17.50	5.22	19.66*
Team work skill	21.92	17.50	4.35	20.42*
Decision making skill	21.55	17.50	4.65	17.42*
IT/computer skill	20.61	17.50	5.26	11.83*
Planning & organization skill	21.73	17.50	4.86	17.41*
Continuous learning skill	22.05	17.50	4.77	19.08*
Self-management skill	21.61	17.50	4.69	17.53*

*significant at .05; df=199; critical t= 1.972

The result in table 2 shows that the various sub-components of employability skills were higher than the critical value of 1.972 at .05 level of significance and 199 degree of freedom. Particularly, the calculated t-values were as follows: communication skills (t=13.57; p< .05), problem solving skills (t=18.98; p<.05), numeracy skill (t=21.27; p<.05), critical thinking skill (t=19.66; p<.05), teamwork skill (t=20.32; p<.05), decision making skill (t=17.42; p<.05), IT/computer skill (t=11.83; p<.05), planning and organization skill (t=17.41; p<.05), continuous learning skill (t=19.08; p<.05), self-management skill (t=17.53; p<.05). With this result, the null hypothesis which states that the level of acquisition of employability skill among universities business education graduates is not significantly low was rejected.

This implies that the level of acquisition of employability skills among universities business education graduates exposed to the programs' curriculum content is significantly low.

Hypothesis two: Business education programs' curriculum contents has no significant influence on the acquisition of employability skills among graduates of universities based on the different options of Accounting, Management and Marketing.

To test this hypothesis, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied in analyzing the data. The result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Mean and standard deviations of variables- option of study

Sub-components	Variable-option of study	N	Mean	Std. Dev.
Communication skills	Accounting	71	3.41	0.713
	Management	116	10.31	4.505
	Marketing	13	2.53	0.484
Problem solving skill	Accounting	71	3.36	0.628
	Management	116	10.01	6.254
	Marketing	13	2.51	0.753
Numeracy skill	Accounting	71	9.51	5.629
	Management	116	3.49	0.578
	Marketing	13	2.56	0.363
Critical thinking skill	Accounting	71	4.35	0.813
	Management	116	8.71	5.252
	Marketing	13	3.34	0.613
Teamwork skill	Accounting	71	4.58	0.614
	Management	116	8.85	3.228
	Marketing	13	9.95	4.011
Decision making skills	Accounting	71	6.93	2.663
	Management	116	9.15	5.415
	Marketing	13	4.63	0.987
IT/computer skills	Accounting	71	4.31	0.864
	Management	116	7.11	1.013
	Marketing	13	3.49	0.555
Planning & organization skills	Accounting	71	5.16	1.058
	Management	116	8.43	3.226
	Marketing	13	6.05	1.251
Continuous learning skills	Accounting	71	3.11	0.550
	Management	116	5.86	1.868
	Marketing	13	3.56	1.118
Self-management skill	Accounting	71	4.14	1.559
	Management	116	6.51	2.154
	Marketing	13	3.77	0.998

Table 4: One way analysis of variance on graduates' option of study
 and acquisition of employability skills

Sub components	Source of variation	Sum of square	df.	Mean square	F-ratio
Communication skill	Between groups	185.127	2	92.511	17.192*
	Within groups	1065.224	196	5.381	
	Total	1250.351	198		
Problem solving skill	Between groups	31.013	2	15.537	2.121
	Within groups	1442.263	196	7.325	
	Total	1473.276	198		
Numeracy skills	Between groups	25.172	2	12.536	1.876
	Within groups	1316.196	196	6.682	
	Total	1341.368	198		
Critical thinking skill	Between group	10.516	2	5.266	0.709
	Within groups	1461.319	196	7.423	
	Total	1471.835	198		
Teamwork skill	Between groups	141.224	2	70.617	11.574*
	Within groups	1202.518	196	6.101	
	Total	1343.742	198		
Decision making skill	Between groups	11.513	2	5.760	0.895
	Within groups	1265.423	196	6.429	
	Total	1276.936	198		
IT/computer skill	Between groups	30.514	2	15.762	2.644
	Within groups	1174.116	196	5.961	
	Total	1204.630	198		
Planning & organization	Between groups	101.065	2	50.533	8.795*
	Within groups	1131.541	196	5.745	
	Total	1232.606	198		
Continuous learning skill	Between groups	21.452	2	10.734	1.729
	Within groups	1221.568	196	6.205	
	Total	1243.020	198		
Self-management skill	Between groups	26.772	2	13.398	2.174
	Within groups	1214.157	196	6.162	
	Total	1240.929	198		

*significant at .05, critical F =3.00

In view of the significant F-ratio of 17.192, 11.574 and 8.795 in respect of communication, team work and planning and organization skills respectively, a pair wise post hoc comparison was applied using Fisher's Least Significant Different (LSD) method in a bid to ascertain the source and direction of the influence. The results are presented in Tables 5, 6 and 7.

Table 5: Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD)
 Multiple comparison analysis of the acquisition of communication skill
 amongst business education graduates based on option of study

Option of study	Accounting (71)	Management (116)	Marketing (13)
Accounting	3.41 ^a	-6.9 ^b	1.19
Management	-19.34 ^{*c}	10.31	8.09
Marketing	1.70	11.93 [*]	2.22
MSW = 5.38			

The entries in Table 5 reveals a significant Fisher's t-value of -19.34 and 11.93 in favour of Accounting and Management options graduates, and a non-significant t-value of 1.70 for marketing option graduates. This means that graduates of business education whose option is accounting were better than those in management option in their acquisition of communication skill when exposed to the program's curriculum content. Conversely, the non-significant result implies that those in marketing option did not acquire communication skills when exposed to the same curriculum content.

Table 6: Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD)
 Multiple comparison analysis of the acquisition of teamwork skill
 amongst business education graduates based on option of study

Option of study	Accounting (71)	Management (116)	Marketing (13)
Accounting	4.58 ^a	-1.27 ^b	-4.34
Management	-11.10 ^{*c}	5.85	-3.07
Marketing	-6.46 [*]	-0.80	8.92

MSW = 6.10

The entries in Table 6 depict a significant Fisher's t-value of -11.10 and -6.46 in favour of accounting and marketing options graduates. This implies that graduates of business education whose option is accounting were better than those in marketing option in their acquisition of team work skill when exposed to the program's curriculum content. In contrast, those in management option did not acquire team work skill when exposed to the same curriculum content.

Table 7: Fisher's Least Significant Difference (LSD)
 Multiple comparison analysis of the acquisition of planning and organization skill
 among business education graduates based on option of study

Option of study	Accounting (71)	Management (116)	Marketing (13)
Accounting	5.16 ^a	-3.27	-0.89
Management	-8.70 ^{*c}	8.43	-2.38
Marketing	-1.23	3.40 [*]	6.05

MSW = 5.74

a = group means are placed along the diagonals

b = difference between group means are placed above the diagonals

c = Fisher's t-value are placed below the diagonal

* Significant at .05 level. Critical t=1.96; df = 198.

The details in Table 7 disclose a significant Fisher's t-value of -8.70 and 3.40 in favour of accounting and management options graduates and a non-significant t-value of -1.23 for marketing option graduates. The implication of this is that business education graduates whose option is accounting took the lead in the acquisition of planning and organization skill ahead of their counterparts in management option when exposed to the program's curriculum content. On the contrary, the non-significant t-value means that those in marketing option did not acquire planning and organization skill when exposed to the same curriculum content.

4. Discussion of Findings

Findings with regards to hypothesis one revealed that the level of employability skill acquisition among university business education graduates exposed to the programs curriculum content is significantly low. This finding is in sync with Akuegwu and Nwue (2013) that universities graduating students' possession of employability skills is significantly low. This finding also earned the support of Abaribe (2012) when he reported on a World Bank assisted study that in various establishments where graduates of Nigerian universities (including those in business education) are employed, discussions have it that these graduates are consistently incapable of performing to the admiration of recruiters because they are found to be poorly equipped with employability skills. This finding should not be a surprise going by the assertion of Ezeani (2012) that university business education curriculum content is bookish.

The second finding disclosed that business education programs curriculum contents does not significantly influence the acquisition of employability skills among graduates of universities in the different options of accounting, management and marketing. This is hinged on the findings that of the 10 employability skills sub-components studied, only 3 were acquired by business education graduates. Explicitly, the post hoc comparison analysis specifically revealed that accounting option graduates acquired all 3 skills, management option graduates acquired 2 skills while marketing option graduates acquired only 1 skill. This finding vindicate Awaiyiga, Onumah and Tsamenyi (2010) for asserting that the acquisition of communication alongside technical and functional skills are indispensable if accounting education graduates desires to be self-fulfilled. On the other hand, the finding upholds the averment of Baker (2013) that teamwork skill is a "cannot do without" skill for marketing option graduates if they must secure employment and progress in it. The finding equally agrees with Ekwe and Abuka (2014) who contemporaneously stressed the abiding need for accounting education graduates to be sufficiently inundated with employability skills. Furthermore, the finding was in consonance with the plausible belief of Romanus and Arowoshegbe (2014) that prospective accounting education graduates must consciously strive to acquire among other skills organizational abilities.

Of important, the inability of business education graduates to acquire other employability skills besides these 3 could be adduced to multifarious factors such as the inadequacy of the programs curriculum content and poor implementation of the curriculum content, which may be brought about by the sidelining of business education experts and stakeholders when developing and/or implementing the curriculum. Equally too, the use of inappropriate teaching methods, social and emotional challenges, ill-equipped libraries and resource centers as well as the lack of adequate exposure to the real world of work during the period of studentship.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings in this study, it was concluded that employability skills acquisition among graduates of universities in the triumvirate options surveyed was significantly low. Going by this displeasing revelation, it will be increasingly daunting for business education graduates to be employed if no desperate moves are made to skim off the slags in the curriculum and reposition the program for the better.

5.1 Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the findings of the study:

- 1) The management of the universities and the regulatory authorities- NUC should urgently embark on curriculum reform that incorporates business education teachers, curriculum planners and developers as well as industry experts. This will avail them the opportunity of appraising the vogue business education curriculum content with a view of spotting any inherent weakness in terms of contents, pedagogy and relevance to the world of work.
- 2) There is a compelling need for the regulatory authority to consciously integrate the Student Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) into the business education programs curriculum, and more so make it not just a sine qua non for graduation, but extend its duration to one year. This will afford the students a relatively long period to interact with the reality in the industry vis a vis the theory learned in school. As a result, employability skills will not be passively acquired, but ingrained as a lifetime habit in the graduate.

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