

PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS REQUIRED OF BUSINESS EDUCATION GRADUATES BY EMPLOYERS

Dr. Ewomaoghene Patience Okoro
Delta State University
Abraka

Abstract

The study assessed problem solving skills required of business education graduates by employers for successful management of organizations in Delta State. The study was guided with one research question and two hypotheses. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population which served as sample comprises 1,886 business operators in 8 Local Governments Areas in Delta Central Senatorial District. A 24-item questionnaire was instrument used for data collection. It has 2 parts: Part A contains 4 items based on the demographic variables namely: name of organization, local government area, gender and years of experience. Part B contains 20 items based on the research question. The questionnaire was structured on 4-point rating scale having the following response options: Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), Very Low Extent (VLE). There was face and content validity of the instrument by 2 experts in business education and 1 expert in measurement and evaluation at the Delta State University, Abraka. To determine the internal consistency of the instrument, 132 copies were administered to 132 employers in Oshimili South Local Government Area which was not part of the study sample. Data collected were analyzed using Cronbach Alpha with 0.83 coefficient result of the Research Question. A total of 1,886 copies of the questionnaire with the help of 48 research assistants were administered to 1,886 business operators, 1,834 were completed and returned (97.24% returned rate). Mean and standard deviations were used to analyze the research question and t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings on Research Question one are: flexible in taking decisions, timely in taking decisions, futuristic and possess wealth of experience in office occupation are to a high extent amongst others. It was recommended that business education students at the university level should have the necessary problem solving skills and business education graduates should undergo workshops and conferences to acquire more problem solving skills.

Keywords: *Problem Solving Skills, Business Education Graduates, Employers, Management, Organizations.*

Introduction

Education is the bedrock for the development of any given society. The education system in Nigeria is structured into three major areas – elementary/primary, secondary and tertiary institutions (Utoware & Igberaharha, 2023). The Federal Republic of Nigeria (2014) categorizes tertiary institutions to include, universities, colleges of education, polytechnics and monotronics. Okute and Agomuo (2010) note that tertiary education train students in diverse fields of specialization for the advancement of modern society. Tertiary education according to Jaja (2013) is a properly coordinated form of education at the institution of higher learning. Utoware & Igberaharha (2023) observe that tertiary institutions are established and charged with the mandate of providing knowledge, skills and training to students who have successfully completed their secondary education and intend to pursue a chosen discipline for future career through institutions of higher learning. The authors further point out that the aims and objectives of tertiary education in Nigeria are itemized by the Federal government to include: contribution to national development through high-level relevant manpower training, inculcating proper values for individual progress and societal continuity, developing the intellectual capacity of learners to comprehend and appreciate the aesthetic appeal of their environment and imparting individuals with physical and mental skills to enhance their self-reliance. One essential attribute of education



at this tertiary level is that learners are able to make a choice of discipline for mastery in a course of study that will lead them to a career. Among the disciplines in Nigerian tertiary education where students can make a choice of career is Business Education which is aptly integrated into technical and vocational education.

Business education as an aspect of vocational education programme which is designed to assist individuals to acquire requisite knowledge, skills and attitude for the world of work (Amesi, & Sobere 2023). Business education also provides students with the opportunities to acquire relevant knowledge, skills and attitude that would enable them to be self-employed. Wiles and Bondi (2014) note that through Business Education, people are guided to acquire skills that are very much needed in the business world. Business education is education for and about business and training in business skills to enable graduates to be self-employed (Okoro, 2024). It is education that enables students to acquire saleable and self-employment skills. Business education in tertiary institutions as described by Suleiman (2017) is divided into the following components: accounting, marketing, management and office information system. Osuala (2004) sees it as a broad based field of study which is concerned with the fiscal structure of a nation by identifying and explaining the level of business gratification and the resources put together to train persons for valuable involvement as citizens, workers and consumers. The objective of Business Education as stated by Edokpolor and Egbri (2017) in Utoware & Igberaharha (2023) include: to adequately equip learners for efficiency in specific office occupation or career, develop in students the requisite skills for successful entrepreneurship and job creation as well as expose students to knowledge about business, including a good blend of computer technology, which encompasses Information and Communication Technology.

As a result of the skills and knowledge students acquire in the management aspect of Business Education, they are exposed to ability to solve problems in various business endeavors. This is what acquisition of problem solving skills entails. Problem solving is the ability to understand a problem by breaking it down into smaller parts, and identifying the key issues, implications and providing solutions. The problem-solving technique guides students through the critical thinking process and utilizes learners collaboration (Hou, 2007 & Nwaokorom, 2019). Students lack ability to identify a problem and how to apply the right approach to get the solution to the problem (Naada, 2010). Problem solving is defined as a system of complex, goal-directed cognitive, affective, and behavioural operations for adapting to internal and external demands, to achieve desired goals. It consists of three components: 1) Problem Solving Ability: This is anchored on confidence which refers to the notion of problem-solving abilities and having positive experiences in solving problems; 2) Problem-solving actions (originally called "Approach-Avoidance Style): This refers to one's drive towards performing those actions that are directed working out successful solutions to problems. 3) Personal Control is the belief in one's emotional and behavioural control while solving problems. Having specific skills and strategies to solve problems and having confidence about one's ability is important to successfully deal with different types of problems in organizations. Organization is an entity, a setup body, school, an industry, the civil service, government establishment, social club, church and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Organizational skills must be built to a certain capacity to handle complex situations in the decision-making process within and outside the organization set. In the absence of problem solving in an organization, it is virtually impossible to achieve stated goals or the organizations vision. Solving organizational problems involves initiatives and projection in the future with a view to forestalling the re-emergence of those issues.

A problem is seen as any form of task, assignment or project that an individual needs to complete, which usually entails several different stages. Some of these stages require specific methods that are related to one's subject area or specialization. Problem solving models or cycles are the ways of moving towards a targeted goal when the path to the target is uncertain. Cognitive psychologists have stated that problem solving cycle involves recognizing the existence of a problem, developing a strategy, recognizing the knowledge required to solve the problem

allocating mental and physical resources to the problem, monitoring progress towards the goal and evaluating the solution.

Complex problem solving requires teamwork or interaction with the task environment that is dynamic in nature and changes with user's intervention and time. When there is difficulty in an organization, conflicts are bound to arise. Business Education graduates are expected to possess the ability to identify, define and solve the problems.

Nwaokokorom & Ikpeama (2023) identify the following problem solving skills required of Business Education Students for job performance in an organization: possess wealth of experience in office occupation, demonstrate high level of courage in task situation, possess mental intelligence, discover alternative approaches to situations, analyze situation, distinguish between cause and effect, brainstorm, reason abstractly, solve mathematical problems, be objective at all times, be innovative, be critical in thinking, possess negotiating activity, understand problems and cope under stress.

Statement of the Problem

The aim of Business Education programme in Nigerian Universities and colleges of education is to impart the relevant skills, knowledge, attitudes to the recipients to enable them self-employed or secure payable jobs in other organizations. The knowledge acquired in Business Education and related courses such as accounting, marketing and management could be useful in solving organizational problems. Unfortunately, there are complaints that Business Education graduates do not possess the relevant problem solving skills and this could lead to low job performance in organizations. The problem of the study is therefore problem solving skills required of business education graduates by employers for management of organizations in Delta State.

Research Question

The following research question guided the study.

Research Question 1: To what extent are problem-solving skills required of Business Education graduates by employers for management of organizations?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are raised to guide the study.

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings between male and female employers of organizations on extent of problem-solving skills required of Business Education graduates for management of organizations.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings between experienced and less experienced employers of organizations on extent of problem-solving skills required of Business Education graduates for management of organizations.

Method

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population which served as sample comprises 1,886 employers of organizations in 8 Local Governments Areas in Delta Central Senatorial District. A 24-item questionnaire was instrument for collection of data. It has 2 parts: Part A contains 4 items based on the demographic variables namely: name of organization, local government area, gender and years of experience. Part B contains 20 items generated from the research question. The questionnaire was structured on a 4-point rating scale with the following response options: Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), Very Low Extent (VLE). There was face and content validity of the instrument by 4 experts in business education and 1 expert in measurement and evaluation at the Delta State University, Abraka. To ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument, 132 copies of the questionnaire were administered to 132 employers in Oshimili South Local Government Area which was not part of

the study sample. Data collected were analyzed using Cronbach Alpha and a coefficient result of 0.83 was obtained. A total of 1,886 copies of the questionnaire with the help of 48 research assistants were administered to 1,886 business operators in Delta Central Senatorial District. 1,834 were completed and returned (97.24% returned rate). Mean and standard deviations were the statistical tools used for analysis of the research question and t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The questionnaire options were weighted as follows: Very High Extent 4-points, High Extent 3-points, Low Extent 2-points, Very Low Extent 1-point. In decision rule, any item with a mean score of 2.5 and above was taken to be High Extent while any item with the mean score less than 2.5 was regarded as Low Extent. In testing of hypotheses, if t-calculated is less than t-critical, hypothesis is retained; if t-calculated is greater than t-critical, the hypothesis is rejected.

Result

Research Question: To what extent are problem-solving skills required of Business Education graduates by employers for management of organizations?

Table 1: Mean Ratings of Managers of Organizations on Problem-Solving Skills Required of Business Education Graduates by employers of Organizations? N = 1834

S/N	Items on Problem Solving Skills Required	X	SD	REMARKS
1.	Flexible in taking decisions	2.84	0.78	High Extent
2.	Timely in taking decisions	2.94	0.82	High Extent
3.	Futuristic	2.87	0.75	High Extent
4.	Possess wealth of experience in office occupation	2.76	0.86	High Extent
5.	Demonstrate high level of courage in task situation	2.87	0.79	High Extent
6.	Possess mental intelligence	2.79	0.88	High Extent
7.	Discover alternative approaches to situations	2.92	0.84	High Extent
8.	Analyze situation	2.88	0.76	High Extent
9.	Distinguish between cause and effect	2.82	0.83	High Extent
10.	Brainstorm	2.76	0.82	High Extent
11.	Reason abstractly	2.89	0.79	High Extent
12.	Solve mathematical problems	2.84	0.87	High Extent
13.	Objective at all times	2.98	0.81	High Extent
14.	Innovative	2.78	0.86	High Extent
15.	Initiative	2.89	0.83	High Extent
16.	Critical in thinking	2.77	0.84	High Extent
17.	Possess negotiating skills	2.89	0.77	High Extent
18.	Understand problems	2.82	0.86	High Extent
19.	Cope under stress	2.75	0.85	High Extent
20.	Evaluate situations	2.86	0.78	High Extent
	Grand Mean	2.82	0.81	High Extent

On the table, the lowest item has a mean value of 2.75 while the highest item has a mean value of 2.98. All the items’ mean values are greater than 2.5 indicating that they are to a high extent. It has the grand mean of 2.82 which is to a high extent.

Testing of hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings between male and female employers on extent of problem-solving skills required of Business Education graduates for management of organizations.

Table 2: t-test result of Mean Ratings between male and female employers on extent of problem-solving skills required of Business Education graduates for management of organizations.

Variables	N	X	SD	Df	Level of Sig.	t-cal	t-crit.	Decision
Male	1023	2.88	0.87	1834	0.05	1.27	1.96	Not Significant
Female	811	2.85	0.79					

The t-calculated 1.27 is less than t-critical 1.96 at 0.05 Level of Significance. The hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings between male and female employers on extent of problem-solving skills required of Business Education graduates for management of organizations, is retained.

- There is no significant difference in the mean ratings between Experienced and Less-experience employers on extent of problem-solving skills required of Business Education graduates for management of organizations.

Table 3: t-test result of Mean Ratings between Experienced and Less-experienced employers on extent of problem-solving skills required of Business Education graduates for management of organizations.

Variables	N	X	SD	Df	Level of Sig.	t-cal	t-crit.	Decision
Experienced	1014	2.91	0.81	1832	0.05	1.29	1.96	Not Significant
Less-experienced	820	2.87	0.74					

The t-calculated 1.29 is less than t-critical 1.96 at 0.05 Level of Significance. The hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings between Experienced and Less-experience employers on extent of problem-solving skills required of Business Education graduates for management of organizations, is retained.

Discussion of findings

Research Question: To what extent are problem-solving skills required of Business Education graduates by employers for management of organizations. The findings are: flexible in taking decisions, timely in taking decisions, futuristic, possess wealth of experience in office occupation, demonstrate courage in task situation, possess mental intelligence, discover alternative approaches to situations, analyze situation, brainstorm, reason abstractly, solve mathematical problems, objective at all times, innovative, initiative, critical in thinking, possess negotiating skills, understand problems, cope under stress and evaluate situations and they are to a high extent. This study is consistent with the earlier study of Nwaokokorom & Ikpeama (2023) which identified the following problem solving skills required of Business Education Students for job performance in organizations: possess wealth of experience in office occupation, demonstrate courage in task situation, possess mental intelligence, discover alternative approaches to situations, analyze situation, brainstorm, reason abstractly, solve mathematical problems, be objective at all times, be innovative, be critical in thinking, possess negotiating activity, understand problems and cope under stress.

The result of the hypotheses on research question 1 are: there is no significant difference in the mean ratings between male and female employers of organizations on extent of problem-solving skills required of Business Education graduates for successful management of organizations and there is no significant difference in the mean ratings between Experienced and Less-experienced managers of organizations on extent of problem-solving skills required of Business Education graduates for successful management of organizations.

Conclusion

Problems in organizations can result in failure of the vision behind which an establishment is set up. When problems continue to exist without solving them, it culminates in failure of many businesses including other organizations such as higher institutions. It is pertinent that owners of businesses and managers should possess experience and requisite knowledge to keep the organization afloat by promptly and effectively handling problems as they arise. Problem solving skills are necessary to enable owners and managers of organizations achieve targeted results.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made from the study.

1. Business education students at the university level should have the necessary problem solving skills.
2. Business education graduates should undergo workshops and conferences to acquire more knowledge in problem solving skills.
3. Business education graduates should be timely in solving problems in organizations.

References

- Amesi, J. & Sobere, M.A., (2023). Business education curriculum implementation and skills acquisition among students in tertiary institutions in rivers state. *Nigerian Journal of Business Education*, 10(2) 30-38
- Edokpolor, J.E. and Egbri, J.N. (2017). Business education in Nigeria for value re-orientation: A strategic approach for poverty alleviation and national development. *Journal of Education Research and Review (JERR)*, 5(3): 41-48.
- Federal Government of Nigeria (2014). *National Policy on Education*. NERC Press.
- Hou, H., Chang, K., & Sung, Y., (2007). An analysis of peer assessment online discussions with a course that uses project-based learning. *Interactive Learning Environments*, 15(3), 237-251
- Jaja, J.M. (2013). Higher Education in Nigeria: its Gain, its Burden. *Global Journal of Human Social Science Linguistics and Education*, 13(14): 20-29.
- Naada, R.N. (2010). The integration of identified employability skills into the Namibian vocational education and training curriculum. University of Stellenbosch.
- Nwaokokorom, O.W. & Ikpeama F.U., (2023). Accounting and problem-solving skills required of business education students for job performance in organizations in a digital era. *Nigerian Journal of Business Education*, 10(1): 20-26.
- Nwaokorom, O.W. (2019). *Employability skills required of business education students in colleges of education for job performance in organizations in Rivers State* (Unpublished master's thesis). Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia Nigeria.

- Okoro, P.E., (2024). Application of Zoom E-learning Management System in Business Education in Universities Nigeria. *International Journal of Religion*, 5(5): 317-326.
- Okute, A.L. and Agomuo, E.E. (2010). Business teacher's perception of the application of e-learning in reforming business courses delivery system in Tertiary Institutions in cross-river and Akwa Ibom State. *Nigerian Vocational Association Journal*, 15(1): 40-54.
- Osuala, E.C. (2004). *Foundation of Vocational Education* (5th Ed). Cheston Agency Ltd.
- Suleiman, U.A. (2017). Meaning of Business Education. Retrieved 10th June, 2019 from <https://www.olabisiblog.wordpress.com/home/> 34-44.
- Utoware, J.D.A & Igberaharha C.O. (2023). Integration of digitalized business education instruction for improved skill acquisition of students at tertiary education level in Delta State, Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Business Education*, 10(1): 27-34.
- Wiles, J.W., & Bondi, J.C., (2014). Curriculum development: A guide to practice (9th edition) M.A: Pearson. 10(2) 38 - 48 www.free-management-ebooks.com/news/six-step-problem-solving-model/