

**IMPROVEMENT OF EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS OF BUSINESS EDUCATION STUDENTS IN PUBLIC TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN ANAMBRA STATE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study determined the strategies for the improvement of employability skills of business education students in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State. Two specific objectives, two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. Survey research design was used for the study. Population of the study was 128 Business Educators in public tertiary institutions that offer business education programme in Anambra State. The entire population was used as the sample size because of its manageable size. A 20-item four point rating scale structured questionnaire developed by the researcher was used for study. The response options were Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was validated by two experts, one in business education and the other in measurement and evaluation. Reliability of the instrument was established using 20 business educators from tertiary institutions in Delta State and Cronbach Alpha reliability method was used. Co-efficient values of 0.95 and 0.94 and an overall reliability value of 0.90 were obtained. 128 copies of the questionnaire were administered by the researcher and two research assistants. 121 copies of the questionnaire were returned and found usable. Data collected were analyzed using mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (SD) and t-test statistics was used to test the null hypotheses. Findings of the study revealed that work based learning and mentoring are strategies for improving the acquisition of employability skills of business education students in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State. Recommendations were made among which was that business educators at tertiary institutions should respond positively to their responsibilities by changing their instructional strategies in order to enhance the acquisition of employability skills by business education graduates.

**Key Words:** Employability skills, acquisition, business education, sustainable development, Tertiary institution.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Education is an important tool through which any country can experience growth and development. It is an instrument for sustainable development. It provides knowledge to sustain one in this competitive environment. The world of employment has changed dramatically. The major challenge in the world today is to find pathways of living and working sustainably, so that the reasonable needs and wants of people from all walks of life and in all countries can be

satisfied (Bagale, 2015)<sup>1</sup>. With the rise of globalization, employability is becoming one of the main goals for educational programmes and business education is not left out. Business education is an educational programme that prepares students for entry into and advancement in jobs within business and prepares them to handle their own business affairs to function intelligently as consumers and citizens in business economy. Mshelia (2019)<sup>2</sup> asserted that it is a type of education that helps someone to learn the facts, acquire skills, develop abilities, solve problems and be able to have business-like attitudes useful for success in business situation. Ndinechi and Ementa in Mshelia (2019) also stated that one of the basic objectives of Business Education is to empower the recipients with desirable skills, knowledge and values to perform specific functions so as to be self-reliant. Business Education therefore equip youths with appropriate skills, knowledge, abilities and competences that can enable the individuals to be self-employed and self-reliant leading to sustainable economic development.

Okon in Okon (2019)<sup>3</sup> defined skill as the ability to perform expertly, facility in performance, dexterity and tact. Skills are very important for poverty reduction, economic recovery and sustainable development. This in line with the views of Mshelia (2019) who stated that skill as basic ability is the means by which man adjust to life. Skill development is essential for increasing the productivity and sustainability of business organizations and improving working conditions and the employability of workers. In this challenging environment, the role of tertiary institution is not only to produce graduates with specific areas of specialization but more importantly, to develop graduate employability skills that match the demands required by industry in electronic world. Confirming this, Akpomie in Amedu (2013)<sup>4</sup> asserted that no nation can move forward technologically, industrially and economically without developing a strong partner initiative in the creation of wealth, poverty reduction and employment generation with required skills.

Dave (2017)<sup>5</sup> stated that employability skills are the core transferrable skills that are needed in nearly every job. These core skills for employability are both important for employers' recruitment and they enhance an individual's ability to secure a job, retain employment and move flexibly in the labour market as well as engage in lifelong learning (Okolocha and Odimmega, 2019)<sup>6</sup>. Employable skills are those skills required by an individual to obtain a job as an employer or employee. Supporting this view Mshelia (2019) stated that employability skills are those skills necessary for getting, keeping and doing well on a job. Mshelia further stated that these are the skills, attitudes and actions that enable workers to get along with their fellows and supervisors and to make sound and critical decisions. Employability skill is crucial in all profession. Employability skills are very important for business education graduates today. Emphasizing on the importance of employability skills, Okolocha and Odimmega (2019) stressed that they are as critical to getting a job as anything students could learn in the classroom. Okolocha and Odimmega (2019) went further to state that the importance of employability skill development today cannot be over emphasized because gone are the days when jobs were available everywhere both in the private and public sectors of the economy and employers go about looking for potential graduates for employment.

Akpomie in Amedu (2013) stated that these skills include technical, human and specific skills include technical human specific skills cope with the challenges of the future. Jacquelyn in Mshelia (2019) generally divided employability skills into three skill sets which are basic academic skills, higher-order thinking skills and personal qualities. However to Iwu (2019) the

employability skills needed to equip the graduates of business education to be able to face the challenges of work expectations are communication, ability, resilience (ability to absolve pressure or shock), technological ability, ability to get organized, self-confidence, professional ethics ability, thinking/analytical ability, positive attitude, teamwork, willingness to learn, human relations ability etc. This should be in addition to his/her core professional area. Acquisition of these employable skills is critical in today's economic realities and for business education students to be effective in their chosen field of work. Acquisition of employability skills increases work focus and related learning/training programme of activities in preparation for prospective job and achieving employability qualification (Iwu, 2019)<sup>7</sup>. It is vital for poverty reduction, economic recovery and sustainable development.

Sustainability development as defined by Adebola in Bagale (2015) is a kind of development that can be initiated and managed properly in such a way as to give attention to continuity and preservation as explore an explicit available resources for the enlargement of their existence. It is the type of development that enables one to be self – reliant. Sustainability development involves the development that meets the needs of the people (Okeke-Ezeanyanwu and Okpala, 2021)<sup>8</sup>. It also enables one to meet the needs of the present as well as future needs and opportunities. Amedu (2013) stated that the concept of sustainable has become a global medium for expressing the needs to depart from hitherto dominant models of development that apparently fail to balance the needs of people and the planet in the pursuit of peace and prosperity. Sustainable development contributes a lot in poverty reduction, unemployment, food security etc. This was why Ekwue, Udemba and Ojuro (2019)<sup>9</sup> stated that Nigeria as a nation will enjoy sustainable development if business education students in particular and all other students in general acquire maximum skills and competence in their specialties. To achieve sustainable development, tertiary institutions are required to turn out qualified graduates through the inculcation of employability skills.

Tertiary education is post-secondary education. There are four public tertiary institutions in Anambra State that offer business education programme. These include two Universities and two Colleges of Education. One of the goals of business education in tertiary institutions is to provide students with hands – on, technical training that prepares them for the rapidly evolving 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. In this challenging environment, the role of tertiary education institutions is not only to produce graduates with specific areas of specialization but more importantly to develop graduate employability skills that match the demand of industries. As such tertiary institutions are under intense pressure from the stakeholders especially industries to equip graduates with more than just academic skills. The acquisition of life-long skills calls for effective and efficient teaching strategies and the utilization of improved and standard instructional facilities, to ensure the production of desired quality of graduates with enterprising skills. However, effective teaching and learning depends on the ability of the teacher to motivate learners to pick interest in learning through different instructional strategies. Strategies as stated by Okoye and Ashibogwu in Okeke-Ezeanyanwu and Oguejiofor (2019)<sup>10</sup> are the techniques or mechanism put in place to maintain degree of quality of excellence of a product or service. Strategies are the same as methods and procedures of attaining a goal. Strategies entail how institutions of learning equip students with the desirable competitive advantage beyond mere classroom performance to deal with the problems of the society. The quality of teachers and the utilization of the right strategies by the teachers play an important role

in improving employability skill acquisition of the students. In a business education classroom, employability skills are best acquired when the classroom replicates key features of real work conditions (Ekwue, Udemba and Ojuro, 2019). There are different strategies for improving acquisition of employability skills of business education students. These include work – based learning strategies, e-portfolio strategies, mentoring strategies, digital literacy strategies and networking strategies. This study will focus on work – based learning strategies and mentoring strategies.

Work-based learning strategies according Nwosu and Okoro (2019)<sup>11</sup> is an educational strategies that provides students with real-life work experiences where they can apply academic and technical skills and develop employability skills. It uses the workplace or real work to provide students with the knowledge and skills that will help them connect school experiences to real-life work activities and future career opportunities. These opportunities are meant to engage, motivate and augment the learning process. Work-based learning can help students develop essential employability skills and build a strong, positive work history. Apart from the work-based learning strategy, there is also the mentoring strategies.

Mentoring is one of the most effective forms of professional development for both the mentor and mentee. Mentoring is a system of semi-structured guidance whereby a more experienced exposed person shares knowledge, skills and experiences with less experienced person in order to assist the less experienced to progress in life or career. It is an effective way to develop empathy, active listening and rapport-building skills, which are relevant to a range of professional opportunities requiring interpersonal and communication skills. The adoption of these improvement strategies by business educators is influenced by certain factors.

Factors that influence the instructional strategies business educators adopt to improve the acquisition of employability skills include: type of institution and years of experience. Different institutions adopt different teaching strategies. Years of teaching experience of business educators also influence the instructional strategies they adopt in order to boost the acquisition of employability skills of business education students for sustainable development in this digital world. It is based on this background that this study was carried out to identify the instructional strategies required by business educators to improve the acquisition of employability skills by business education students in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State.

## **2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The growing problem of unemployment in Nigeria has contributed largely to the worsening problem of poverty among the populace. Unfortunately, it has been observed that graduates (business education graduates inclusive) from the nation's tertiary institutions have been unable to get jobs in the labour market. They roam the streets in search of means of livelihood. It appears that these graduates are not well prepared and equipped with adequate skills that will enable them have equal job opportunity in the labour market and also exploit the natural resources that abound in Nigeria. No wonder, Okeke-Ezeanyanwu and oguejiofor (2019) lamented that employers mostly complain of possession of inadequate skills, low practical know-how and lack of confidence by business education graduates. This is an indication of skill gap or skill mismatch which has been acknowledged as a global issue.

Employability skills are necessary for obtaining, sustaining and progressing in a job. Graduates of business education deficiency in these skills may be attributed to the teaching method adopted by business educators in teaching which do not promote the acquisition of employability skills for sustainable development. Hence the need to identify the strategies to improve the acquisition of employability skills by business education graduates.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to determine the strategies for improving the acquisition of employability skills of business education students. Specifically, the study sought to determine the:

1. Work-based learning strategies for improving the acquisition of employability skills of business education students in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State.
2. Mentoring strategies for improving the acquisition of employability skills of business education students in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State.

### **Research Questions**

The study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the work-based learning strategies for improving the acquisition of employability skills of business education students in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State?
2. What are the mentoring strategies for improving the acquisition of employability skills of business education in tertiary institutions in Anambra State?

### **Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of business educators in universities and business educators in Colleges of Education on the work-based learning strategies for improving acquisition of employability skills of business education students in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of business educators on the mentoring strategies for improving the acquisition of employability skills of business education students in public tertiary institution in Anambra State based on years of experience.

### **3. METHOD**

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A survey research design is one which aims at collecting data and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts about a given population (Nworgu, 2015)<sup>12</sup>. This design was considered appropriate for the study since it sought the opinions of business educators on the strategies for improving the acquisition of employability skills of business education students. The population of the study consisted of 128 business educators from four public tertiary institutions that offer business education

programme in Anambra State. The entire population was used as the sample size because of its manageable size. Hence there was no sampling.

A 20-item four point rating scale structured questionnaire developed by the researcher was used for the study. The instrument titled “strategies for improving employability skill acquisition of business education Questionnaire” has two sections A and B. Section A contains items on demographic data of respondents while section B contains 20 items arranged in two clusters of B<sub>1</sub> and B<sub>2</sub>, each cluster contains 10 items. The response options were: Strongly Agreed (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was validated by two experts, one in business education and the other in measurement and evaluation. Reliability of the instrument was established using 20 business educators from tertiary institution in Delta State. The application of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 using Cronbach Alpha reliability method yielded coefficient values of 0.95 and 0.94 and an overall reliability value of 0.90.

128 copies of the questionnaire were administered through personal contact by the researcher with the help of two research assistants. The research assistants were briefed by the researcher on how to administer the questionnaire in order to ensure good completion and return of the questionnaire. 121 copies (92%) of the questionnaire were returned and found usable. The analysis was based on this number. Data collected were analyzed using mean (x) standard deviation (SD) and t-test statistic was used to test the null hypotheses. The analyses were done with SPSS version 21 in order to ensure that precision is attained. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. Each item was interpreted based on the real limit of the mean corresponding to each item as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) 3.50 – 4.00, Agree (A) 2.50 – 3.49, Disagree (D) 1.50 – 2.49, Strongly Disagree (SD) 1.00 – 1.49. t-test statistics was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was rejected when the P-value was less than 0.05 level of significant. On the other hand, where the P-value was greater than 0.05 level of significance, the hypothesis was accepted.

**4.RESULT**

**Research Question 1**

What are the work-based learning strategies for improving the acquisition of employability skills of business education students in Public tertiary Institutions in Anambra State?

**Table I: Mean and standard deviation of respondents on work-based learning strategies.**  
(N= 121)

S/N	Item statements	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Makes curriculum relevant by integrating theory and practice to the classroom experience	3.55	.51	SA
2.	Creates greater flexibility to meet individual student needs and goals	3.57	.49	SA
3.	Develops interpersonal skills through professional interactions in job settings	3.64	.54	SA

4.	Develop working partnerships between the school, business, industry and community	3.55	.50	SA
5.	Builds positive public relations that attract students and enhance the school reputation in the community.	3.62	.49	SA
6.	Upgrade quality of school graduates.	3.56	.51	SA
7.	Improves job entry and advancement.	3.65	.48	SA
8.	Increases motivation and improves student reputation.	3.43	.49	A
9.	Offers an organized plan of training on the job under actual business conditions.	3.55	.53	SA
10	Increases awareness of civil and social responsibilities.	3.54	.50	SA
Grand Mean		3.57		SA

As revealed by the cluster Mean of 3.57 in Table 1, business educators strongly agreed that work-based learning strategies improves business education students’ acquisition of employability skills in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State. The item by item analysis show that items 1,2, 3,4,5,6,7,9 and 10 with the mean ratings ranging from 3.54 to 3.64 were rated strongly agreed by business educators. Item 8 was rated agreed with a mean score of 3.43.

**Research Question 2**

What are the mentoring strategies for improving the acquisition of employability skills of business education students in public tertiary Institutions in Anambra State?

**Table 2: Mean and standard deviation of respondents on the mentoring strategies.**  
(N=12)1

S/N	Items on mentoring strategies	Mean	SD	Remark
11.	Promote learning through role modeling.	3.70	.46	SA
12.	Facilitate growth and development of entrepreneurial skills.	3.68	.31	SA
13.	Collaboration between teachers and students.	3.55	.31	SA
14.	Sharing valuable knowledge and experience with students.	3.62	.49	SA
15.	Develop one’s coaching skills	3.64	.50	SA
16	Develop undergraduates interest in one’s sector and business.	3.64	.48	SA
17.	Develop one’s reflective learning	3.30	.49	SA
18	Increase one’s awareness of diversity issues.	3.53	.56	SA
19.	Increasing retention and motivation.	3.44	.51	SA

20.	Support assignment with technical training and feedback.	3.57	.50	SA
	Grand Mean	3.56		SA

The data analysis in Table 2 shows the grand mean of 3.56 which revealed that business educators strongly agreed that mentoring is a strategy for improving the acquisition of business education students in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State. The item by item analysis shows that items 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18 and 20 with the mean ratings ranging from 3.53 to 3.70 were rated strongly agreed by business educators in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State. Items 17 and 19 were rated agreed by business educators with mean scores of 3.30 and 3.44

**Test of Hypotheses**

**Hypothesis 1**

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of business educators in Universities and business educators in Colleges of Education on the work-based learning strategies for improving acquisition of employability skills of business education students in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State.

**Table 3: t-test analysis of mean difference in the mean responses of business educators in universities and Colleges of Education on work-based learning strategy for improving acquisition of employability skills of business education students in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State.**

Type of institution	N	X	SD	Df	t-val.	P-value	Dec
Universities	17	3.58	2.04	83	1.35	0.184	NS
Colleges of Education	104	3.40	2.71				

Data in Table 3 shows a t-value of 1.35 with a degree of freedom of 83 and p-value of 0.184 which is greater than 0.05. This shows that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of business educators in universities and business educators in Colleges of Education on work-based learning strategy for improving acquisition of employability skills in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State.

**Hypothesis 2:**

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of business educators on the mentoring strategies for improving acquisition of employability skills of business education students in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State based on years of experience.

**Table 4: t-test analysis of mean differences in the mean response of business educators on the mentoring strategy for improving acquisition of employability skills of business education students in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State based on years of experience.**

Years of Experience	N	X	SD	df	t-val.	P-value	Decision
Experienced	67	3.56	2.26	83	0.79	0.433	NS
Inexperienced	54	3.44	2.49				

Data in table 4 show a t-value of 0.79 with a degree of freedom of 83 and p-value of 0.433 which is greater than 0.05. This shows that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of business educators in universities and business educators in Colleges of Education on mentoring strategy for improving acquisition of employability skills in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State based on years of experience.

**5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

Findings of the study revealed business educators strongly agreed that work-based learning is a strategy for improving the acquisition of employability skills of business education students in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State. This is in consonance with the findings of Baba (2013)<sup>13</sup> who stated that work-based learning is a form of experiential learning that exposes students to real-work problems that require a blend of skills and knowledge. These skills will help students as they search for post-graduation employment opportunities. The marketability of students increases because they have greater skills or ability that can be applied in the real world of business. The findings also agrees with Donnini in Obi (2019)<sup>14</sup> who stated that in order to overcome the key challenge of ever increasing unemployment affecting business education students due to lack of employability skills, stakeholders should reform the mode of training with special emphasis on restructuring teachers who will double as teachers of theory and instructors of practical skills. Test of hypothesis one revealed that there was no significant difference on the mean ratings of business educators on work-based strategy for improving the acquisition of employability skills of business education students in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State based on their type of institutions.

Findings of the study also revealed that business educators strongly agreed that mentoring strategy helps to improve the acquisition of employability skills of business education students in public tertiary institutions in Anambra State. This finding is in line with the views of Nwokike (2016)<sup>15</sup> who stated that mentoring as an instructional skill for improving the entrepreneurial competences of business education students, requires that every business education student should be encouraged to have a mentor for acquiring skills and life experiences. Through mentoring, an employability skill opens the window of sustainable development of human capital and repositions graduates to eradicate poverty. Still supporting the findings of the study, Nikitina and Lapina (2017)<sup>16</sup> suggested that collaborative learning, solving of real-life problems,

teamwork, work-based learning and professional mentoring are the new approaches faculty of education could adapt to develop graduates' competences and behaviour.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Education for sustainable development allows every human being to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to shape a sustainable future. Education for sustainable development means including key sustainable development issues into teaching and learning. To achieve this, business education programme at the tertiary level therefore requires participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower business education students to change their behaviour and take action for sustainable development.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. The management of tertiary institutions should encourage and support business educators with relevant incentives for them to attend workshops, seminars and conferences both locally and internationally to enable them improve on their teaching methodologies and update their knowledge and skills in line with the expectations of the world of work.
2. Business educators at tertiary institutions should respond positively to their responsibilities by changing their instructional strategies in order to enhance the acquisition of employability skills by business education graduates.

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