



PERCEPTION OF UNIVERSITY LECTURERS ON CORE CURRICULUM MINIMUM ACADEMIC STANDARDS' (CCMAS) AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF 21ST CENTURY SKILLS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigates the perceptions of university lecturers on the Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards' (CCMAS) and the development of 21st century skills. To direct the study and help it reach its goals, two research questions and two correspondence hypotheses were devised. The study used survey research as its methodology. Twenty-four university lecturers from federal and state universities in Ebonyi State. A 14-item questionnaire titled "Perception of University Lecturers on the Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards Questionnaire (PULCCMASQ)" was used for the study. Twelve University Lecturers at the University of Cross Rivers State who were not involved in the study were used to test the instrument, and the results showed that the instrument was reliable for the purpose of the investigation with an overall coefficient of 0.79 using Cronbach Alpha. The 23 respondents each received one of the 23 copies of the questionnaire, and 23 copies were returned, representing a 100% return rate. Descriptive statistics of frequency, mean, and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. Meanwhile, the research hypothesis was tested using an independent t-test at the 0.05 level of significance. The result of the findings showed that the university lecturers have a positive perception of the business education area of specialization, and the university lecturers have a favorable perception of the CCMAS's development of 21st century skills among Business Education students. It was concluded that CCMAS has given the Business Education Program a opportunity to specialize in four different areas: accounting education, entrepreneurship education, marketing and distribution education, and office management. It was equally recommended that the NUC ought to ensure that CCMAS endures since it is the best hope for long-term educational sustainability in Nigeria.

Key Words: Perception, University Lecturers, CCMAS, Business Education, and 21st Century Skills

Introduction

The National Universities Commission (NUC) was founded in 1962. Located within the Federal Ministry of Education (FME), the National Universities Commission (NUC) is a parastatal. The NUC has grown from a little office in the cabinet office to a significant part of the government's development and administration of higher education in Nigeria. The obligation of NUC is to approve the establishment of all higher education institutions offering degree programs in Nigerian universities, approve the running of all academic programs in Nigerian universities, guarantee the caliber of all academic programs offered in Nigerian universities, and provide the Nigerian universities with a channel for all outside funding.

The management of Nigeria's university educational system is based on the aforementioned responsibilities of NUC. Section 10 (1) of the Education Act (National Minimum Standards and Establishment of Institutions Act, Cap. E3, Law of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004) gave the commission the authority to carry out the task. Thus, the NUC is empowered to establish Minimum Academic Standards for all colleges, universities, and other degree-granting institutions of higher learning within the federal government and to accredit the degrees and other academic programs they grant. The Nigerian University System (NUS) started making its first attempts to put this legal framework into practice in 1989 after working together with Nigerian Universities to create the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS) for all programs in Nigerian universities (Abubakar, 2022).

The use of the MAS documents as a critical tool for quality control in the Nigerian University System was ultimately authorized by the Federal Government. The texts needed to be revised because



they were largely content-based and merely prescriptive, therefore the Commission started a process to do so in 2001. The NUC established outcome-driven benchmark pronouncements for each program in 2004 after holding a workshop that gave all relevant parties a chance to fully debate the matter. The Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) are the result of the Commission's establishment of a system in 2007 for the fusion of the Benchmark-style Statements with the updated Minimum Academic Standards. This was done in response to criticisms and input from the universities that the Benchmark-style Statements were insufficient for certification and too simplistic to truly drive the development of curriculum. The resulting BMAS, a combination of the benchmark statements that were outcome-based and the MAS that were content-based, clearly stated the intended learning outcomes and capabilities. The Commission organized a group of qualified academic experts in 2016 to develop a BMAS in Computing, raising the overall total of specialties in Nigerian Universities to fourteen. This was done in order to make the NUS relevant to international trends in higher education (Abubakar, 2022).

The BMAS was replaced by the CCMAS in 2018, allowing the new and current specialization and programs in the Nigerian University System to better reflect the realities of the twenty-first century. This was accomplished in line with the National Universities Commission's objective to improve the responsiveness of Nigerian higher education to societal requirements. The result of ongoing stakeholder interactions over a two-year period is the new CCMAS. The triple helix model was taken into consideration as a special characteristic in the composition of each panel. Academic authorities, academies, the government (represented by NUC), professional associations, and, naturally, the business sector, represented by the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG), were among the participants. All major stakeholders, including the appropriate academic departments of Nigerian universities, the private sector, professional organizations, and academies, received copies of each discipline's draft materials in order to enhance the drafts. These contributions served as the main working resources for the many panels created for that aim, together with the curriculum of programs obtained from several foreign and recognized colleges (Akpo, Chukwurah, Beshibeshebe, Godwin, Idike, Ugbadu, and Orim, 2023). With the CCMAS papers' distinctive structure, universities can fulfill 70% of the prerequisites for the various degrees whereas using the balance of 30% for additional cutting-edge courses in their own fields of expertise. There are unique learning goals for each program and course in addition to the overarching learning objectives for each field. In most cases, programs are set up so that an individual cannot enroll in a maximum of 48 credit units in one academic year or less than 30 credit units in one academic year.

Adamu (2022) asserted that, the NUC is thus hopeful that the 2022 CCMAS materials will serve as a blueprint for Nigerian universities as they create their program curriculum. This is particularly accurate when it comes to the minimal requirements for input and processing as well as the quantitative benchmarks of knowledge, 21st century skills, and competences expected to be attained by a typical graduate of each academic program for relevance to the graduate's own, the nations, and the world at large.

Atah, Nwuso, and Bessong (2022) revealed that Business education is a specialized profession developed to offer graduates with the knowledge, skills, and competence they need to be employable and advance in office occupations, to develop their expertise in delivering business areas at different stages of learning, and to become self-employed or labor employers (Idika, Ochui, and Atah, 2023). Students are exposed to general education through this programme, which is a component of occupational education and training. The Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards have provided Business Education programs with areas of specialization like accounting education, entrepreneurial education, marketing and distribution Education, as well as office management education, in order to bridge the knowledge and practice gap. This projected program mentioned above provides individuals with relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies to be self-reliant and economically self-sufficient for gainful employment and meaningful living and to contribute to the development of society. Atah, Nwosu, and Bessong (2022) opined that, in order to ensure that the education and training provided are in line with the skills for the current and emerging employment requirements and opportunities, the core curriculum is established in accordance with the needs of the business community for the development of 21st century skills for employability in the world of work.

Looking the provision of the aforementioned area of specialization, the uniqueness feature of the programme, Civic and social learning development is emphasized, the development of fundamental practical and cognitive skills is accelerated for business education teaching effectiveness, the development of financial literacy skills has been scaled up, emphasis is placed on the theoretical underpinnings of entrepreneurship, students are knowledgeable about professional business ethics and career growth, students learn creative and practical abilities that will allow them to function and conduct business in a digital environment while engaging in both domestic and international marketing strategies, professional



accounting courses that expose Business Education students to industry requirements are now prioritized in order to close the knowledge gap between theory and practice in the accounting profession (Atah, Bessong, and Ogbuji. 2018). The core curriculum minimum academic standards have provided and repositioning business education students to acquire the 21st century entrepreneurial and employability skills such as digital citizenship skills, digital literacy skills, media literacy skills, team work skills, multitasking skills, information literacy skills, capacity building skills, adaptability skills, critical thinking skills, business analytical skills customer service skills, research skills, communication skills, problem solving skills and flexibility skills (Atah and Ukah, 2019). Interestingly, the knowledge and skills that graduates of business education can gain and acquire in the twenty-first century will help them fit into and take advantage of modern business opportunities, job chances, and opportunities to work for themselves or as employers of workforce globally.

Regrettably, the CCMAS developed by the NUC have been rejected by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU). The union described it as terrifying, a danger to the standard of higher education, and a diminution of the authority of the university Senate in Nigerian universities. Osodeke reiterated this and said it was absurd that the Nigerian University System was being forced to adopt prepackaged CCMAS curriculum comprising 70% of NUC, while university Senates who are tasked with developing academic programs by statute were only allowed to work on 30%. He added that the various flaws and obvious weaknesses of the CCMAS materials were causing considerable alarm. However, the university administration fulfilled the 30% mandate and submitted it to NUC without raising any issues. Furthermore, according to ASUU President Emmanuel Osodeke in Lucky (2023), stated that, the new curriculum framework will undermine the power of the university senate in Nigerian universities and jeopardize the standard of higher education. According to the union, the NUC "pre-packaged" 70% of the CCMAS contents and foisted them on the Nigerian University System (NUS).

In support of the view of Osodeke in Lucky (2023), the CCMAS developed by NUC has once again been rejected by the National Association of Academic Technologists (NAAT). During its 52nd National Executive Council (NEC) meeting, the association made the choice. The NAAT asserted that the CCMAS document under consideration was put together and distributed without input from its members, who are significant stakeholders in Nigeria's university system, and as a result, it remains an anomaly capable of undermining the standards of academic programs in the area of laboratory, workshop, studio, or research farm practices (Adegwu, 2023). However, Adamu (2022) disagrees with the opinion of ASSU and NAAT, putting emphasis on the fact that the Commission, however, organized a 3-day validation workshop (face-to-face mode) before the curriculum review content and language editing were finished in order to validate the CCMAS documents and foster ownership for straightforward implementation. The Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG), Vice-Chancellors, and Directors of Academic Planning from Nigerian Universities, alongside STRADVCOM, were significant participants in this event. According to the NUC, the CCMAS as developed to educate and prepare undergraduate students seeking their first degrees in the many fields of education within the Nigerian University System It is impossible to overstate the beauty of this core curriculum, but it also offers four areas of specialization in business education, including office management, marketing and distribution, accounting, and entrepreneurship. This will ensure that business education programs at public, private, and state universities are uniform in their content delivery for the development of society. As a result, the students will have the chance to select a specialty and become experts in their field of study (Otum and Atah, 2021).

The availability of accounting education in CCMAS may give students the chance to have a solid foundation in the subject of accounting and learn how to tackle any accounting challenge. Akeke & Atah (2023) asserted that Business education students will be able to comprehend their financial situations both personally and professionally, make better data-driven decisions, and develop their professions. The goal of accounting education as a business education specialty is to prepare students to work as professional accountants and teachers in the 21st century.

The goal of entrepreneurial education as a business education specialization could be to enhance students' capacity to produce social, cultural, or economic value. Chukwurah and Atah (2019) asserted that student's entrepreneurial attitude can be developed through providing opportunities for critical and creative thinking, complex problem solving, negotiation, communication, and leadership. Ukah & Atah (2021) argue that the inclusion of entrepreneurial education in business curriculum at this time is a positive development and a crucial step toward transforming the way many Nigerian graduates operate on their own in the international marketplace.

Distribution and marketing Students can study many marketing functions in accordance to their individual professional preferences thanks to the education specialty. Atsu; Ateb & Atah (2021) opined that,



students who enroll in marketing classes have the chance to prepare resumes, use computers, hone communication and public speaking abilities, practice for job or college interviews, and put their knowledge and skills from on-the-job training to use. Additionally, marketing course participants are qualified to join DECA, a local, state, and international student vocational organization. Membership gives students the chance to advance their career goals, demonstrate their capacity for leadership and academic success in the workplace, and open up possibilities for financial aid (Atah, Idike, Godwin, Isaac, Ititim, Okpe, and Orim, 2023).

Office Management Education as a specialization in business education is CCMAS an added advantage to give students the chance to obtain the necessary professional skills to assist them succeed in their careers and achieve their goals. Idike, Nyiam & Atah, (2022) confirmed that office management Education prepare students with abilities are unquestionably in-demand and necessary in the workplace of the twenty-first century, and graduates of business education might be ready earlier than expected to fit in globally. The students' specialization could help them get ready, develop their soft skills, acquire transferable abilities, increase their chances of finding employment, and advance in their careers. The study therefore ascertained the Perception of University Lecturers on core curriculum minimum academic standards and the Development of 21st Century Skills.

Research questions

1. What is the perception of University Lecturers on Business Education Area of Specialization and the Development of 21st century skills?
2. What is the perception of University Lecturers on CCMAS and the Development of 21st Century Skills

Research hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of the perception of university lecturers on business education area of specialization and the development of 21st century skills based on gender
2. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of the perception of university lecturers on CCMAS and the development of 21st Century Skills based on institutional type.

Methodology

This investigation employed a survey methodology with 23 respondents, which included 15) male and (8) female University Lecturers from two universities in Ebonyi State, Abakaliki (Academic Planning Unit, 2023). Since the population was small enough to be researched as a whole, the entire population was investigated. As a result, the respondents were chosen using the census method. These universities used in the study were Ebonyi State University and Alex Ekwueme University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State. A 14)-item questionnaire was developed to guide the investigation. The study's instrument was a four-point rating scale questionnaire titled "Perception of University Lecturers on the Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standards Questionnaire (CCMASQ)." The instrument was trial tested on twelve University lecturers in University of Cross River State who were not part of the study, and the pilot test yielded an overall coefficient of 0.79, which indicates that the instrument was reliable for the research work. The survey questionnaire was distributed to the 23 respondents, and all 23 copies were returned and used in the for the data analysis. The mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question, and an independent t-test was used to test the research hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance. The decision rules were based on a benchmark point of 2.50, which was considered positive perception, while any item below 2.50 was considered negative perception. For the hypotheses, if the t-value calculated was greater than the p-value at the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis was accepted; if not, it was rejected. The hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance. The population distribution is shown in Figure 1.

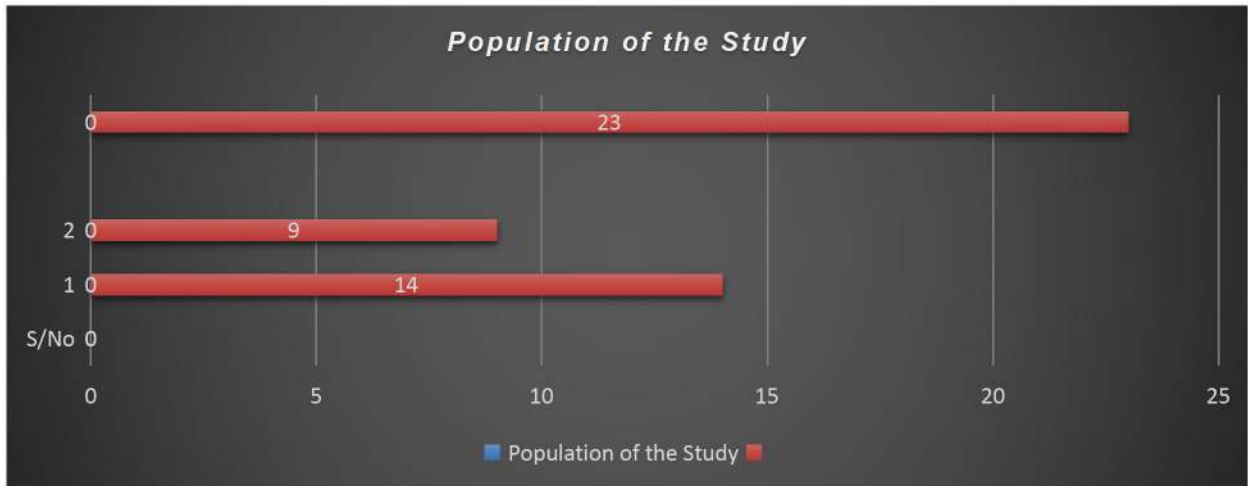


Fig. 1: 3 D-Stacked Bar describing the population of the study

Results

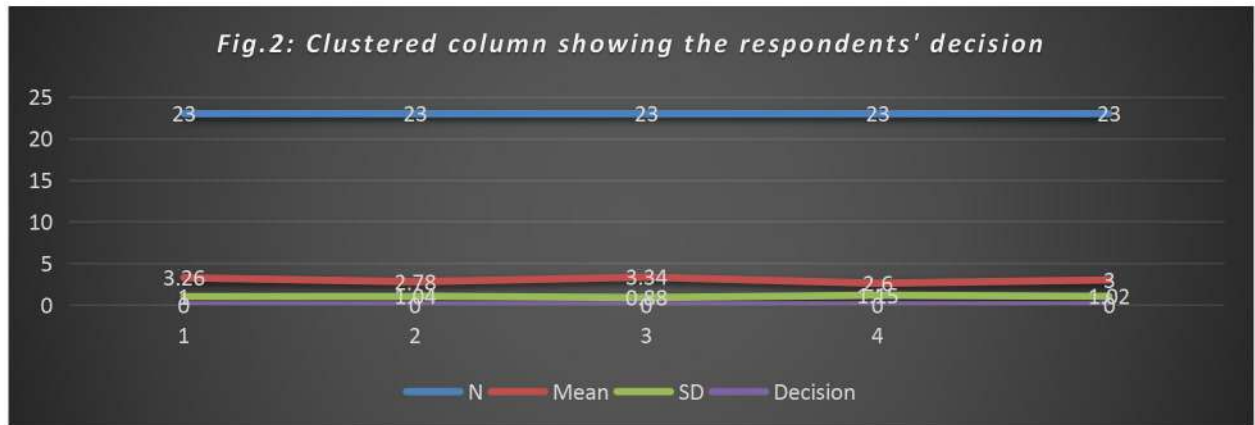
Research Question 1

What is the perception of university lecturers on Business Education area of specialization and the development of 21st Century Skills?

Table 1: Mean rating of respondents on the perception of university lecturers on Business Education area of specialization and the development of 21st Century skills

S/No.	Business Education Area of Specialization in CCMAS	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Accounting Education	23	3.26	1.00	Agree
2	Entrepreneurial Education	23	2.78	1.04	Agree
3	Marketing and Distributive Education	23	3.34	.88	Agree
4	Office Management Education	23	2.60	1.15	Agree
	Grand Mean	23	3.00	1.02	Agree

In view in the result in Table 1, it can be concluded that university lecturers have a favorable opinion of the area of specialization in business education and the development of 21st century skills in the CCMAS. Generally speaking, the 3.00 grand mean of the respondents' responses is higher than the decision level benchmark of 2.50. This suggests that both the development of 21st-century skills and the area of specialty in business education are pertinent to the graduates of business education and the entire world. The results further show the degree of agreement in Figure 2 using clustered columns.



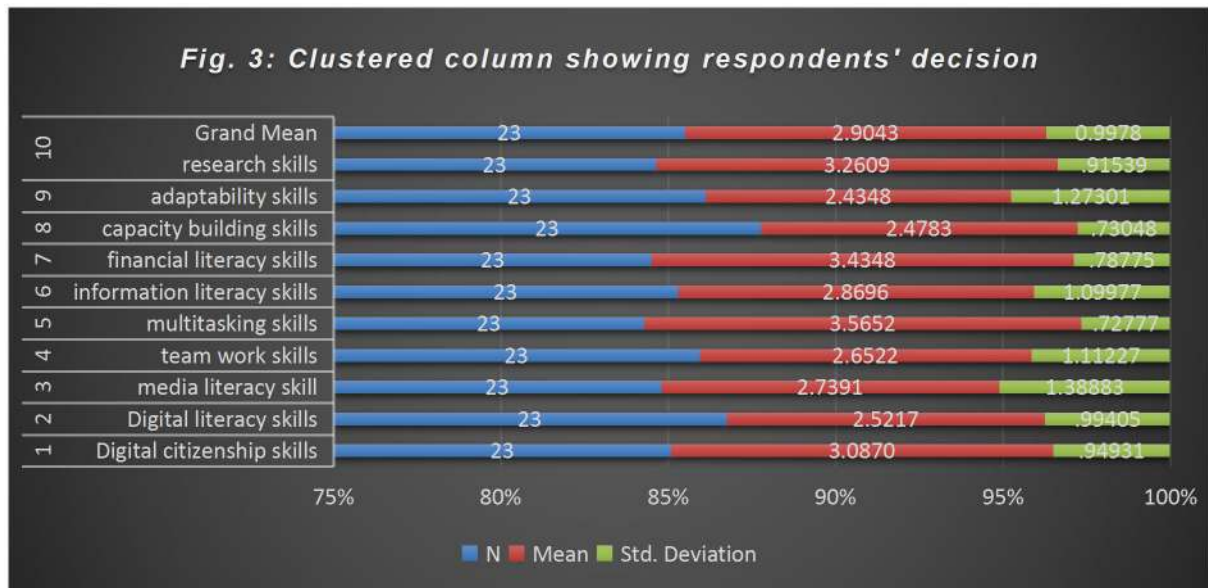
Research question 2

What is the perception of university lecturers on CCMAS and the Development of 21st Century Skills

Table 2: Mean rating on respondents on the perception of University Lecturers on CCMAS and the Development of 21st Century skills

S/No.	21st Century Skills Development	N	Mean	SD	Decision
5	Digital citizenship skills	23	3.08	.94	Agree
6	Digital literacy skills	23	2.52	.99	Agree
7	Media literacy skill	23	2.73	1.38	Agree
8	Team work skills	23	2.65	1.11	Agree
9	Multitasking skills	23	3.56	.72	Agree
10	Information literacy skills	23	2.86	1.09	Agree
11	Financial literacy skills	23	3.43	.78	Agree
12	Capacity building skills	23	2.47	.73	Agree
13	Adaptability skills	23	2.43	1.27	Agree
14	Research skills	23	3.26	.91	Agree
	Grand Mean	23	2.90	0.99	Agree

According to Table 2's findings revealed that, perception of University Lecturers on CCMAS and the Development of 21st Century skills is positive. In general, respondents' responses have a grand mean of 2.90, which is higher than the decision level standard of 2.50. This suggests that for business education programs to expand and thrive, the development of 21st-century skills among university graduates is crucial and relevant. The results further show the degree of agreement in Figure 3 using clustered columns.



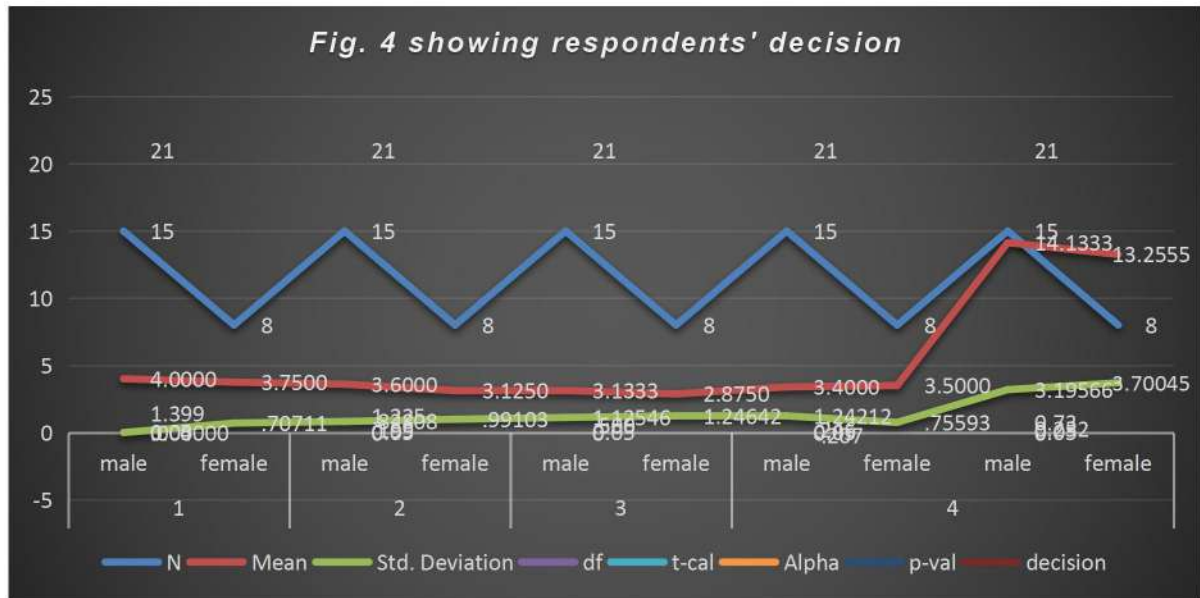
Research Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference in the mean perception of university lecturers on Business Education area of specialization and the development of 21st Century skills based on gender

Table 3: Independents samples t-test result on respondents' responses on the perception of university lecturers on Business Education Area of Specialization and the development of 21st century skills

Items	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	df	t-cal	Alpha	p-val	Decision
1	male	15	4.0000	0.00000	21	1.399	0.05	.004	S
	female	8	3.7500	.70711					
2	male	15	3.6000	.82808	21	1.225	0.05	.199	NS
	female	8	3.1250	.99103					
3	male	15	3.1333	1.12546	21	.506	0.05	.560	NS
	female	8	2.8750	1.24642					
4	male	15	3.4000	1.24212	21	-.207	0.05	.246	NS
	female	8	3.5000	.75593					
	male	15	14.1333	3.19566	21	0.73	0.05	0.252	NS
	female	8	13.2555	3.70045					

According to the independent t-test analysis shown in Table 3, there is no significant variations between male and female university lecturers' mean ratings of the development of 21st-century skills and the specialization in business education. This is as a result of the p-value of 0.252 is higher than 0.05, this is indeed the case. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which claimed there was no discernible difference between the mean ratings of university lecturers' perceptions of their area of specialization and the development of 21st century skills, is upheld. The findings are further shown in Figure 4 using clustered columns.



Research Hypothesis Two

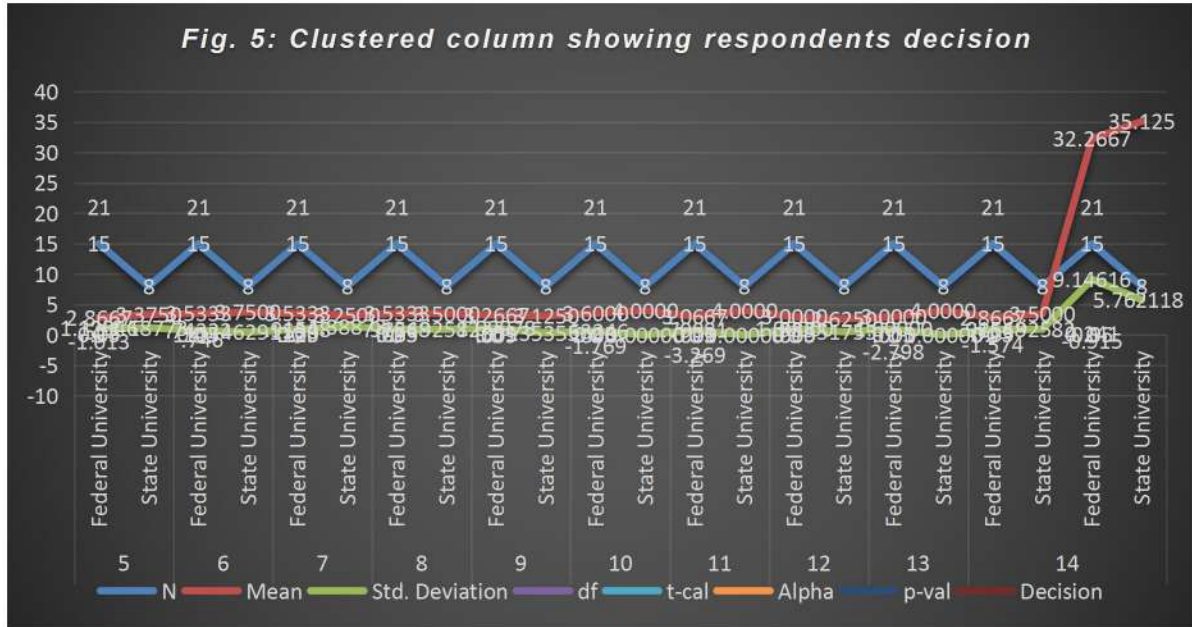
There is no significant difference in the mean perception of university lecturers on CCMAS and the development of 21st century Skills based on institutional type.

Table 4: Independents t-test results on responses on mean rating on the perception of university lecturers on CCMAS and the development of 21st century skills based on institutional type

Items	Institutions Type	N	Mean	SD	df	t-cal	Alpha	p-val	Decision
5	Federal University	15	2.8667	1.12546	21	-1.013	0.05	.525	NS
	State University	8	3.3750	1.18773	7	1.399	0.05	.000	S
6	Federal University	15	3.5333	.74322	21	-.746	0.05	.103	S
	State University	8	3.7500	.46291	7	2.8750	0.05	.001	S
7	Federal University	15	3.5333	.91548	21	.590	0.05	.120	S
	State University	8	3.2500	1.38873	7	1.13546	0.05	.009	S
8	Federal University	15	3.5333	.91548	21	.083	0.05	.786	NS
	State University	8	3.5000	.92582	7	1.24212	0.05	.241	NS
9	Federal University	15	3.2667	1.09978	21	.351	0.05	.009	S
	State University	8	3.1250	.35355	7	1.13546	0.05	.009	S
10	Federal University	15	3.6000	.63246	21	-1.769	0.05	.000	S
	State University	8	4.0000	0.00000	7	1.399	0.05	.000	S
11	Federal University	15	3.0667	.79881	21	-3.269	0.05	.001	S
	State University	8	4.0000	0.00000	7	1.399	0.05	.000	S
12	Federal University	15	3.0000	1.00000	21	.985	0.05	.000	S
	State University	8	2.6250	.51755	7	1.399	0.05	.000	S
13	Federal University	15	3.0000	1.00000	21	-2.798	0.05	.001	S
	State University	8	4.0000	0.00000	7	1.399	0.05	.000	S
14	Federal University	15	2.8667	.91548	21	-1.574	0.05	.866	NS
	State University	8	3.5000	.92582	7	1.24212	0.05	.241	NS
	Federal University	15	32.266	9.14616	21	-0.915	0.05	0.241	NS
	State University	8	35.125	5.76211					



According to the independent t-test analysis shown in Table 4, there is no discernible difference between institutional type and the mean evaluation of university lecturers' perceptions of CCMAS and the development of 21st century abilities. Because the p-value of 0.241 is higher than 0.05, this really is the case. Therefore, the null hypothesis, which claimed there is no discernible difference between institutional type and the mean rating of university lecturers' perceptions of CCMAS and the development of 21st century skills, is retained. The findings are further shown in Figure 5 using clustered columns.



Discussion of the findings

The results of research question 1 demonstrate that university lecturers have an overwhelmingly positive view of the CCMAS's business education area of expertise. The overall average of the respondents' 3.00 responses is higher than the decision level threshold of 2.50. This suggests that the development of contemporary skills and the area of specialization in business education are of high value and importance on a worldwide scale. This could be because the university students that will be accommodated in CCMAS will have the opportunity to choose from the four options in business education to build a career. This result is in agreement with Otum & Atah (2021), whose finding revealed that specialization in business education, that is, accounting education, office management, marketing and distribution, and entrepreneurship, will ensure that business education programs at public, private, and state universities are uniform in human capital development. The authors further stated that students have the choice to select a specialty to become experts in their field of study. Ukah &Atah (2021) confirmed that the inclusion of entrepreneurial education in the business curriculum at this time is a positive development and a crucial step toward transforming the way many Nigerian graduates operate on their own in the international marketplace. In consonance with Idika, Ochui, and Atah (2023), business education is a specialized profession created to provide students with the knowledge, skills, and competence they need to be employable, advance in office occupations, develop their abilities as educators in teaching business subjects at various educational levels, and start their own businesses or hire people as employees. However, the findings disagreed with Osodeke in Adegwu (2023), who asserted that ASUU rejected the core curriculum's minimum academic standard. The result of the hypothesis state that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of the perception of university lecturers on business education area of specialization and the development of 21st century skills based on gender.

According to the results of research question two, university lecturers have an enthusiastic view of CCMAS and the advancement of 21st-century abilities. Greater than the decision level threshold of 2.50 is the grand mean of 2.90 responses from respondents. It also indicates that the continued expansion and development of business education programs depend on the development of 21st century competencies among Nigerian graduates. This finding is in consonance with Atah, Bessong, and Ogbuji (2018), who opined that the uniqueness feature of the business education program guarantees students the



development of fundamental practical and cognitive skills that are accelerated for business education teaching effectiveness. Idika, Ochui, and Atah (2023) agreed that business education is a specialized profession created to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and competence they need to be employable and advance in office occupations, develop their didactic abilities in imparting business subjects at different levels of education, and become independently-employed or labor employers as well. The program is designed in such a way that it provides individuals with relevant knowledge, skills, and competencies to be self-reliant and economically self-sufficient for gainful employment and meaningful living and to contribute to the development of society. According to Atah and Ukah (2019), acquiring 21st century skills would help students to participate in and take advantage of modern opportunities in business and employment, be self-employed, or be recruiters of workforce globally. Interestingly, the provision of 21st century skills in the core curriculum minimum academic standards has provided and repositioned business education students to acquire 21st century entrepreneurial and employability skills such as digital citizenship skills, digital literacy skills, media literacy skills, teamwork skills, multitasking skills, information literacy skills, capacity building skills, adaptability skills, critical thinking skills, business analytical skills, customer service skills, research skills, communication skills, problem solving skills, and flexibility skills, which are essential in the 21st century work environment. The result of the hypothesis state that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of the perception of university lecturers on CCMAS and the development of 21st Century Skills based on institutional type.

Conclusion

The study's findings indicate that University Lecturers favorably view the Core curriculum Minimum Standards (CCMAS). This might be the case as a result of the CCMAS giving the Business Education Program a opportunity to specialize in four different areas, including accounting, entrepreneurship, marketing, and office management. This fundamental information will improve the program's capacity to run consistently across all of the universities in the nation. Digital literacy, digital citizenship, flexibility, critical thinking, multitasking, information literacy, term work, creative and innovation skills, and media literacy skills are just a few of the 21st century skills sources that have been accommodated by the CCMAS. If given the chance, business education students will gratefully maximize and prepare themselves for the global opportunities.

Recommendations

The ensuing suggestions were made:

1. The NUC ought to ensure that CCMAS endures since it is the best hope for long-term educational sustainability.
2. The NUC is the top body governing the educational system in Nigeria. When evaluating curriculum, the NUC should continue to consider other association perspectives exclusively.
3. Instead of becoming combative, associations in the universities should strengthen their collaboration with NUC.
4. The implementation team should see to it that the newborn CCMAS is not killed but instead is fostered.

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