



GENERIC SKILL ACQUISITION AND THE REALIZATION OF THE GOALS OF BUSINESS EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: IMPLICATIONS FOR CURRICULUM INNOVATION

OBI OLUCHI CHINAZOR

*Department of Vocational and Technical
Education Nnamdi Azikiwe University,
Awka, Anambra State
oc.obi@unizik.edu.ng*

Abstract

This paper focused on generic skill acquisition and the realization of the goals of business education in Nigerian universities: Implications for curriculum Innovation. It examined the overview of generic skills, conceptualization of business education, business education curriculum and goals as well as acquisition of generic skills through business education curriculum. Based on the discussions in the work, the researchers concluded that there is need for business education students to possess generic skills viz-a-viz hard skills to enable them secure, sustain and advance on any job. This will, no doubt, enable graduates to become self-reliant and to have competitive edge. It was recommended, among others that curriculum planners should review the curriculum to cover generic skills; business educators should incorporate generic skills in their day to day activities; professional bodies such as Association of Business Educators of Nigeria (ABEN), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and so on are called to buttress the need for acquisition of generic skills by the students.

Keywords: *Generic skills, acquisition, business education, curriculum, innovation*

Introduction

Education is sometimes perceived as a sector which is resistant to change, while at the same time it faces a crisis of productivity and efficiency which affects the labour market. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, OECD (2016), education has a vital role to play in developing the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that enable people contribute to and benefit from an inclusive and sustainable future. There is no gainsay that learning to form clear and purposeful goals, work well with others, find untapped opportunities and identify multiple solutions to big problems will become inevitable in the coming years. Education needs to aim to do more than prepare young people for the world of work; it needs to equip students with the skills they needed to become active, responsible and engaged citizens. Williams (2015) observed that employers recruit new employees on the basis of competencies in technical or hard skills and non-technical or soft or generic skill. However, employers have continued to express their regret that some employees lack the required generic skill relevant for the particular work settings. Rao in Selvadurai, Choy and Maros (2012) defined hard skills as technical or



administrative procedures that are related to organization's core business.

Selvadurai, Choy and Maros (2012) define generic skills as behavioral skills characterized by intangible attributes and entail emotional intelligence; and its subjective is hard to measure and very much rational in nature. These skills, according to them, support each other in a person's life for adaptability and sustainability in a place of work. The skills do not fall from sky but require that it be inculcated in a persons' life during a course of study especially in university education.

University education according to Adebakin, Ajadi and Subair (2015) is the main instrument to prepare individuals for a rapidly-changing, increasingly-demanding world of work and to improve their employability. It encompasses different disciplines with related skills to be acquired for effectiveness and efficiency in the place of work. This discipline among others is business education.

Business education as a discipline is expected to expose its recipients to diversity curricula; hence, it is that type of education that inculcates in its recipients' attitudes, knowledge, skills, values that is required in the business world. It should be a means of producing healthy, literate, self-driven citizens for employability and self-reliant globally for sustainable development in the changing world. Business education is expected to impact skills and creative knowledge required for employment generation opportunities, such as the technical skills and non-technical skills that would also make the business graduates to adopt some strategic survival instincts.

Universities quest to assess employability is not only curriculum adjustment and development driven but is also hinged on the fact that employers of labour are increasingly looking out for "employability skills" and when there is an observed lack of employability skill in graduates who have been employed; it tends to cause higher training cost to both government and private sector employers (Zakaria, Yatim, & Ismail, 2014). Studies have also found gaps in the possession of non-technical skills as major challenge in employability of graduates (Jackson in Odukoya et al.). Similarly, other authors observed a mismatch between university output and labor market demand, pointing out the curiosity of employers about graduates on their readiness to work. This paper, therefore, attempts to explore the generic skill acquisition and realization of the goals of Business Education in Nigerian universities.

Overview of Generic Skills

The growing emphasis on generic skills in higher education has several sources. One is the increasing evidence of demand from business and employer organizations for graduates to possess generic skills. The contemporary focus on generic skills is really part of a bigger, as yet unresolved, debate about the purpose of university education and how to develop well-educated persons who are both employable and capable of contributing to civil society.

Generic skills, according to Gera and Singh (2015), equip one to organize, adapt, and strategically apply specific skills in new situations and circumstances. Furthermore, Gera et al. noted that generic skills also enable one to generate new skills that help to succeed in novel situations, manage and adapt to change and to flourish by creating what matters, even in the face of adversity. Selvadurai, Choy and Maros (2012), cited authors who referred to generic skills as a set of achievements, understandings and personal attributes that enables prospective graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen field or career.

Generic skills build self-esteem and self-confidence at the personal front that enable personal and professional advancement, and at the same time create



opportunities at the professional front (Rao in Selvadurail, Choy and Maros ; 2012). According to Bowman (2010), generic skills include; loyalty, personal presentation, balanced attitude to work and home life, commitment, common sense, ability to deal with pressure, honesty and integrity, positive self- esteem. He further listed others as motivation, enthusiasm, a sense of humour, adaptability as well as reliability. Similarly, Aquah (2014) listed the following generic skills, they include initiative, enthusiasm, inquisitiveness, interest in continuous learning, courage, self-reliance, comfort with uncertainty Self-confidence, self-control, self-knowledge, positive outlook towards adversity, independence, appreciation of diversity, perseverance, Creativity, flexibility, open mindedness, language and communication skills, assertiveness, sense of humour and above all, resourcefulness and adaptability.

Business Education: Goals and Curriculum

Business education means many things to many people. Aliyu in Ezeani (2012) defined business education as an educational programme which involves acquisition of skills, knowledge and competences which makes the recipient/beneficiary proficient. It is an umbrella under which all business programmes take a shield, such as marketing, business administration, secretarial studies or office technology and management and accounting. Osuala in Agomuo and Etong (2013) defined business education to be education for occupations, distribution and marketing occupations, business teaching, business administration and economic understanding. In this era of globalization, business education contributes greatly in the economic development of any nation and has become an indispensable tool for development. Business education is a programme of study that prepares individuals with multiple skills to teach, or work in industry and to equally set up a business as an entrepreneur and employ others (Ibrahim, 2017). Business education is geared towards preparing graduates to be able to work in a business environment or be self-reliant and succeed in them. The question is, "do these graduates have all it take to be sustained in business or in place of work when challenges, innovative changes occur. It is expected that business education programme provides soft skills or generic skills and hard skills in order to sail through world of work contributing meaningfully to the economic development of the country. Onyesom, Egbule and Okwukenye (2012) noted that business education should be seen as a means of adjustment of the individual to his business environment.

Objectives of Business Education

The following are objectives of business education as stated by Asuquo in Olufunwa, Waziri and Olorunmolu (2013). They include:

1. To provide opportunity for practical job preparation or vocation studies for students in order to make them render effective and efficient services in office, distributive and service occupation.
2. To prepare students based on interest and aptitudes with the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to enter into a business occupation, advance and profit in it.
3. To provide opportunities for students to develop an understanding of the business and economic system of the nation so as to enable them participate actively as producers and consumers of goods and services.
4. To develop in students the basic awareness of the contribution which



- business and office employees make to the nation's economy.
5. To develop and improve the personal qualities and attitude of students as required in personal and employment situation.
 6. To serve as a guide for individual students for suitable placement in business and office employment.
 7. To enable students have career consciousness and economic understanding of the free enterprise system.
 8. To prepare students for leadership position in both public and private life.

Business Education Curriculum

The term curriculum comes from the Latin word "currere" which means a "race course" or "to runway" on which one runs to reach a goal. With time it came to mean the "course of study. Curriculum is the offering of socially valued knowledge, skills and attitudes that may be available to students through a variety of arrangements during the time they are at school, college or university (Ibrahim, 2017). Njoku in Ibrahim (2017) defined curriculum as a group of courses or planned experience in proper sequence of topics designed to prepare an individual for efficient service in a specific vocation. This, therefore, suggests that the curriculum for any programme should be carefully and effectively planned to enable the objectives of that programme to be achieved. A curriculum is a document which comprises the goals and objectives of a particular course of study, the subject matter, or content, the learning, the learning experiences and evaluation. For every course of study including business education to achieve its goals, there must be stipulated document in that course of study called curriculum.

Business education is offered at all levels of education in Nigeria. At the junior secondary level is called business studies. At senior secondary level, it is called business subjects including book-keeping/accounts, office practice, commerce) and at tertiary level, it is called business education including accounting, management, banking and finance, marketing, cooperative economics, entrepreneurship, computer, and office technology and management etc. Aquah (2014) argues that the curriculum offerings, especially at the tertiary levels cater for some of the requirements of the 21st century skills. The author further explained that these generic skills are achieved through core and elective courses taken in other departments such as sociology department, psychology, law and others. In spite of this, graduates of this programme join the ranks of unemployment and inability for those employed to carry out their assigned duties without further training. This creates doubts as to the relevance, functionality and adequacy of the curriculum and its delivery system in meeting the demands of employability.

Business Education Curriculum and Acquisition of Generic Skills

The overall goal of business education as enumerated above is to prepare individuals who are skilled to contribute to the economic development of a nation, thrive in chosen occupation as well as the needed background for teaching business subjects.

For business education to provide the individual with the knowledge, generic skills and attitude needed to take up readily available jobs or openings in the global job market, it becomes imperative that our educational system must function optimally and the curriculum must encompass the most current topics that will provide the requisite knowledge, skills (generic) attitude that will enable the individuals avail themselves



with the job openings and opportunities in the global market.

Available evidences show that institutions offering business education turn out graduates in large numbers annually, but regrettably, unemployment is on the increase in Nigeria. Those who are employed are found to be unable to carry out their assigned duties without further training; neither are they found to possess the generic skills such as honesty, loyalty, and so on, needed to complement their employability skills.

It is desideratum at this junction, to interrogate the effectiveness, relevance, and functionality of the curriculum and curriculum materials used in the educational process, particularly in business education. It is to this question that this study will address itself. The study will address the issue of curriculum materials, instructional method, seminars and workshop and teaching environment.

1. **Curriculum Contents:** Generic skills cut across all disciplines. Oresanya in Ismail and Mohammed (2015) observed that TVET graduates in Nigeria lack generic skills due to not incorporating generic skills in the curriculum of Nigerian tertiary institutions. Similarly, Edet and Udida, among other scholars, disclosed from their findings that business education programs curriculum contents does not significantly influence the acquisition of generic skills among graduates of universities in the different options. Based on this, it is clear that business education curriculum does not sufficiently provide the necessary learning experiences that can equip students with generic skills required for the world of work. Hence, there is an urgent need for review of business education curriculum.
2. **Instructional Method:** The use of appropriate instructional methods throughout a student's year of study develops in him the generic skill expected of him. Madar (2015) posits that participatory teaching methods enable students to be active, and demonstrate different activities including; group discussions, self-directed learning, peer-teaching, presentation and role plays. The author further suggested that all attributes of participatory teaching promote development of generic skills of students. Torres, Palomeque, Liebanas and Lorite (2015) suggested that cooperative learning creates opportunities for students to continuously discuss, debating and clarifying their understanding of the concepts and materials being considered during the class teaching. Through this, students develop higher-order thinking skills, enhance motivation and improve interpersonal relations, as well as enhancing motivation.
3. **Organization of Workshops/Seminars:** Organizing workshops/seminars for students before graduation is very crucial. Adawi (2017) maintains that seminars have been used as a teaching method since Socrates for their value in engaging students in the teaching and learning process. This creates high-order thinking skills and promotes intellectual curiosity in students. This medium can enhance the necessary skills among business education students through invitation of resource persons for business presentation. The resource persons should be experts in the field of business.
4. **Involvement in Student Work Experience Scheme:** Yusoff, Omar, Zaharim, Mohamed, Muhamad and Mustapha (2010) assert that industrial training is



one of approaches to help students to prepare for “work-ready” graduates. It is part of the learning process to apply theories learned in college and to develop technical skills and employability skills. The authors maintain that SIWES provides exposure to realities of the working environment and an opportunity to gain ‘hands-on’ working experience in related industries. Students’ engagement in the training attachment (internship) to business organizations will enable them develop the necessary skills required for successful business. To ensure the development of generic skills, the activities expected from them that cover generic skill attributes should be included in their IT report booklet and the cover letter sent to their organization. The students should also be assessed on that by the IT based supervisors and school-based supervisors. This motivates them in areas where they are not competent enough and help them to exhibit what they have learnt in school, hence industrial training is one of the fulfillments in offering business education programmes (Pitan,2015).

Conclusions

Based on the discussions in the work, the researchers concluded that there is need for business education students to possess generic skills viz-a-viz hard skills to enable them secure, sustain and advance on any job. This will, no doubt, enable graduates to become self-reliant and to have competitive edge.

Recommendations

1. Business education curriculum should bereviewed.
2. This review should be carried out on regular bases to provide inputs from the learner, the teacher, the school, the society and theenvironment.
3. Efforts should be made to highlight in the curriculum the 21st century skills which are crucial to employment within Nigeria and in the global village. This must also include generic skills as highlighted in thisstudy.
4. To match theory with practice in business education, conscious effort should be made to provide adequate time-tabling for the classroom teaching andlearning.
5. It is suggested that all stakeholders in the curriculum should participate effectively during the planning and reviewprocess.
6. In addition, it is suggested that teachers, learners and employers take advantage of field trips and the student industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) to expose learners to work methods and provide needed experience in attitudinalskill.
7. Professional bodies such as Association of Business Educators of Nigeria (ABEN), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) and so on are called to buttress the need for acquisition of generic skills by thestudents.



References

- Adebakin, A. B., Ajadi, T. O. & Subair, S. T. (2015). Required and possessed university graduate employability skills: Perceptions of the Nigerian employers. *World Journal of Education* 5(2).
<http://www.sciedu.ca/journal/index.php/wje/article/view/6267>
- Agomuo, E. E. & Etong, E. C. (2013). Funding and administrative constraints affecting business education programme at the NCE level in North Central Zone of Nigeria. *Nigeran Journal of Education*, 1(2).
- Al'Adawi, S. A. (2017). Exploring the effectiveness of implementing seminars as a teaching and an assessment method in a children's literature course. *English Language Teaching*, 10(11).<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1157953.pdf>
- Aquah, P. A., (2014). Enriching the business education curriculum for relevance in the global workforce. *Global Journal of Human-Social Science: G linguistics & Education* 14(7).
- Bautista, I. (2016). Generic competences acquisition through classroom activities in first-year agricultural engineering students. *International Journal of Educational Technology in High Education* 13, 29. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-016-0028-8>
- Belaineh, M. S. (2017). Students' conception of learning environment and their approach to learning and its implication on quality education. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1149752.pdf>
- Bowman, K. (2010). Background paper for the AQF Council on generic skills. https://www.academia.edu/8365066/Generic_skills_background_paper_FINAL
- Edet, D. A. & Udida, F. U. (2019). Business education programs curriculum contents and acquisition of employability skills among graduates of universities in Cross River state, Nigeria. *European Journal of Education Studies*. <https://oapub.org/edu/index.php/ejes/article/view/2246/4885>
- Ezeani, N. S. (2012). The teacher and skills acquisition at business education: from the perspective of accounting skills. *Arabian Journal of Business and Management Review (OMAN Chapter)* 2(4).
<https://academicjournals.org/journal/ERR/article-full-text-pdf/6D2C41365248>
- Ibrahim, M. Y. (2017). Influence of business education curriculum on entrepreneurial skills of colleges of education graduates in north-central zone, Nigeria. <http://kubanni.abu.edu.ng/jspui/bitstream/123456789/10194/1/influence%20of%20business%20education%20curriculum%20on%20%20%20entrepreneurial%20skills%20of%20colleges%20of%20education%20graduates%20in%20north-central%20zone%2c%20nigeria.pdf>



- Ismail, S. & Mohammed, D. S. (2015). Employability skills in TVET curriculum in Nigeria Federal Universities of Technology. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 204.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282971461_Employability_Skills_in_TVET_Curriculum_in_Nigeria_Federal_Universities_of_Technology
- Madar, J. M. (2015). Impact of participatory teaching on students' generic skills in tertiary education. *African Educational Research Journal* 3(3).<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1216271.pdf>
- Nicols, D. (2009). Assessment for learner self-regulation: enhancing achievement in the first years using learning technologies. *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education*, 4(3).
- Odukoya, J. A., Amos, A., Gesinde, J. A., Sholarin, A., adeusi, s., Elegbeleye, A., Igbokwe, D. & Olowookere, E. *International Journal of Library & Educational Science*, 2(3). file:///C:/Users/Oly/AppData/Local/Temp/2.%20IJLES%20-%20EMPLOYERS%20 PERCEPTION%20OF%20COVENANT%20UNIVERSITY%20GRADUATES%20(1).pdf
- Olufunwa, A. S., Waziri, A. A. & Olorunmolu (2013). Funding of Business education programmes for quality assurance in colleges of education in Kaduna State. *Nigeran Journal of Business Education*, 1(2).
- Onyesom, M., Egbule, N. C. & Okwukenye, A. E. (2012). Business education in Nigeria: Changes, challenges and chances. Association of Business Educators of Nigeria Book of Reading, 2(1).
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2016). Innovating education and educating for innovation. The Power of Digital Technologies and Skills. <http://www.oecd.org/education/cei/GEIS2016-Background-document.pdf>
- Pitan, O. S. (2016). Towards enhancing university graduate employability in Nigeria. *Journal of Sociology and Social Anthropology* 7(1).https://www.researchgate.net/publication/303997149_Towards_Enhancing_University_Graduate_Employability_in_Nigeria.



Selvadurai, S., Choy, E. A. & Maros, M. (2012). Generic skills of prospective graduates from the employers' perspectives. *Asian Social Science* 8(12).
<http://www.ccsenet.org/journal/index.php/ass/article/view/20989>

Singh, H. & Gera, M. (2015). Generic skills for sustainable development.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/286901029_Generic_Skills_for_Sustainable_Development
Thomas, T. (2011). Developing first year students' critical thinking skills. *Asian social science*, 7(4)

Torres, M. I. & Lorite, T. G. B. (2015). <https://library.iated.org/view/TORRES2015GEN>

Williams, A. C. (2015). Soft skills perceived by students and employers as relevant employability skills. <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2426&context=dissertations>

Yusoff, Y. M, Omar, M. Z., Zaharim, A., Mohamed, A., Muhamad, N. & Mustapha, R. (2010). Enhancing employability skills through industrial training programme. <http://www.wseas.us/e-library/conferences/2010/Corfu/EDUCATION/EDUCATION-70.pdf>

Zakaria, M. H., Yatim, B. & Ismail, S. (2014). A new approach in measuring graduate employability skills. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/270584352_A_new_approach_in_measuring_graduate_employability_skills