

Soft Skills Needed by University Business Education Students for Gainful Employment on Graduation in Public Universities in Enugu State

Okanazu, Oliver O., Agu, Nathan O. and Okanazu, Promise U.

Department of Business Education

University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State

Corresponding Author: promise.okanazu@gmail.com.

Abstract

This study evolved soft skills needed by university business education students for gainful employment in Enugu state. Specifically, it determined decision making skills, problem solving skills and creativity skills needed by business education students for gainful employment. Survey research design was adopted. Population was made up of 106 lecturers and final year students of public Universities offering Business education programme in Enugu, Nigeria. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Findings include 12 decision making skills such as ability to: process available information to arrive at a conclusion ($\bar{X} = 3.75$), identify alternatives/choices in a given situation ($\bar{X} = 3.55$); 12 problem solving skills include ability to: to frame, analyze, synthesize information in order to solve problem ($\bar{X} = 3.65$), apply knowledge from many different areas in solving a task ($\bar{X} = 3.55$); 12 creativity skills such as ability to: make connections from various pieces of information ($\bar{X} = 3.75$), see and identify problems ($\bar{X} = 3.45$). Based on the finding five recommendations were made.

Keywords: Soft, Skills, Business Education, Students, Decision, Marking, Problem, Solving, Creativity.

Introduction

Business education is designed to produce skillful and dynamic business educators, office administrators and businessmen and women who would effectively compete in job market or become successful entrepreneurs through inculcating in its recipients, attitudes, knowledge, skills, values that are required in the business world (Hodges & Burchell 2023). Mfam & Ntino (2018) also reported that business education concerns itself with development of knowledge and attitude needed for success in any business occupation. Global trends however have shown that students recently are leaving school without

acquiring the requisite skills in the area of both hard and soft skills so as to foster individual, community or national development through gainful employment (Chertavian, 2019). To avert this negative trend, Business education students need both soft and practical skills in order to be effective in their workplace. Business education embraces skill building programmes in decision making, problem solving, creative thinking as well as leadership training and wealth generation (Okanazu, Madu, & Anyakoha, 2017). Business education further aims at raising awareness on students about business and skills that would make it's recipient self-reliant, and

independent productive citizens of the society (Igbokwe, 2019). According to Okoye (2017), in business education programme, students are expected to acquire soft skills like decision making, problem solving, and creative thinking skills to enable them be gainfully employed on graduation.

Skill is practical ability, manual dexterity through repetitive performance of an operation, and organized sequence of actions, proficiency executed and usually displayed in flexible but systematic temporal pattern (Uloko, 2018; Odu, 2019, Okorie, 2021). Generally, skills can be grouped into hard and soft skills. Soft skills are interpersonal and behavioural skills that help one work well with other people (Herrity, 2024). According to Kenton, *et al.*, (2024), soft skills are character traits and interpersonal skills that characterize a person's ability to interact effectively with others so as to ensure organizational success. They are those skills which make one employable, self-reliant, and relevant to the society. Soft skills are individual's ability to turn ideas into action (European Skills Panorama, 2017). They include decision making, problem solving, creative thinking and risk-taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. Soft skills are vital in promoting competitiveness and in fostering innovative economic sustainable development (European Commission, 2017). Soft skills provide benefits that enable students of Business education function effectively in the current highly competitive environment and strong market forces in other to turn business problems into business opportunities. Decision making, problem solving and creativity skills are crucial for Business education student.

Decision making refers to the choice of the most appropriate solution among possible alternatives (Kolman, 2023). The ability to make effective decisions is a good leadership skill that earns favour with employers and can help one gain promotions. Duncan & Dunifon, (2021) noted that virtually every job involves some level of individual decision making. All career paths require a large amount of decision making. Rangu, *et al* (2024) noted that decision making is the act of choosing between two or more courses of action. It involves choosing between possible solutions to problem which could come through either an intuitive or reasoned processes. The possibilities of attainment of organizational goals and objectives hinge on the sole act of decision making and when the right decisions are made at the right time, organizational or individual problems will be solved.

Problem-solving skills are the ability to identify and analyze problems, brainstorm, evolve and analyze answers, then implement the best solutions (Kaplan, & Petta, 2023). As stated by Pachauri & Yadav (2022), problem-solving skill is ability to proffer solution to complex and emerging problems as it occurs It is a skill that is very relevant and which a graduate of business education should possess in order to excel greatly in his chosen career and to be gainfully employed. Kaplan, & Petta, (2023) further opined that a student with good problem-solving skills is both a self-starter and a collaborative teammate who is proactive in understanding the root of a problem and works with others to consider a wide range of solutions before deciding how to move forward. Acquisition of these skills will enable students/graduates of business education to identify business problems and become critical thinkers so

as to turn the identified business problems into opportunities thereby increase an organization's productivity and sustainability and working collaboratively with other employees in the organization to see to the achievement of the organization's set objective (Ajaero, 2019; Tang, 2018).

Creativity skills according to Perry (2024) cover a broad spectrum of logical, emotional, and practical abilities that contribute to the generation of original and innovative ideas, and solutions. These skills enable one to pave the right approach for problem-solving and innovation and at the same time enable individuals to approach challenges with flexibility and adaptability (Elizabeth, 2024). Creativity skill is the ability to come up with unique, original solutions. It is the ability to bring something into play that either did not exist before or, at least, is relatively new for its context (Jennifer, 2023). It entails using one's initiative to create new ideas which can be made into a reality. It also involves showing a strong personal drive and not waiting to be told to do things. Creativity includes both mental and physical processes undertaken by an individual or group to solve specific problems resulting in the production of statistically infrequent solutions which are useful to the society (Ikpeama & Nwaokokorom, 2017). Creativity obviously involves some form of display of ability to do something and most often in a new way. It involves developing problem solving skills, evolving new technologies and ways of solving problem. Possession of creativity skill gives rise to self and gainful employment (Bortz, 2017). However, when creativity is lacking, it is obvious that a coherent framework for the implementation of strong entrepreneurial

culture will equally be missing thus, resulting in unemployment, lack of due process to encourage innovations, and related challenges (Carroll, 2017). Consequently, acquisition of creativity skills, alongside decision making and problem-solving skills is highly advocated for business students to enhance their ability to obtain gainful employment on graduation, hence the need for this study.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study was to evolve soft skills needed by university Business education students for gainful employment in Enugu state. Specifically, the study determined:

1. decision making skills needed by university Business education students (UBES) for gainful employment,
2. problem solving skills needed by UBES for gainful employment.
3. creativity skills needed by UBES for gainful employment,

Methodology

Research Design: Descriptive survey research design was used for the study.

Area of the Study: The study was carried out in two public universities in Enugu state, namely, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) and Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT). Both Universities offer Business Education programmes. Enugu state is in the South Eastern part of Nigeria. There are 17 Local Government Areas in the State; these Local Government Areas are similar in many respects as they share common boundaries. They are principally Igbo speaking and Christians.

Population for the Study: The population for the study was 106 persons, made up of 26 business education lecturers - (18 from UNN and eight from ESUT) and 80 final year students (53 from UNN and 27 from

ESUT) in 2021/2022 academic session. Office of the Head of Department of Business Education UNN and ESUT 2024. The entire population was studied since it was small and manageable.

Instrument for Data Collection: The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. It was developed based on literature reviewed and purpose of the study. The instrument was divided into A and B sections. Section A focused on personal information of the respondents while the rest dealt with the three specific purposes of the study. It had a 4-point rating scale of strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with the respective value of 4, 3, 2 and 1. Three university experts Business Education validated the

questionnaire. To establish reliability of the instrument, it was 20 respondents that were not part of the study population, and Cronbach Alpha reliability method which yielded 0.87.

Method of Data Collection: Hundred and six (106) copies of the questionnaire were distributed by hand with the help of two trained assistant. Only 103 copies were retrieved and used for the analysis.

Method of Data Analysis: Data were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Based on the 4-point of the instrument scale mean of 2.50 ($\bar{X} \geq 2.50$) and above was considered "agree" while item with the mean less than 2.50 ($\bar{X} \leq 2.50$) was considered "disagree."

Findings of the Study

Table 1: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation of Lecturers and Business Education Students on Decision Making Skills Needed by University Business Education Students.

S/N	Decision Making	\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	\bar{X}_g	R
	Ability to:						
1	identify the problem or decision to be made.	3.5	0.9	3.6	0.9	3.54	SA
2	identify alternatives/choices in a given situation	3.8	0.7	3.3	0.6	3.55	SA
3	seek information on each alternative	3.6	0.9	3.7	0.8	3.65	SA
4	consider consequences of each alternative	3.7	0.6	3.7	0.7	3.7	SA
5	select/choose the best alternative	3.1	0.8	3.6	1.7	3.35	A
6	act on the decision/choice	3.7	0.8	3.9	0.9	3.8	SA
7	evaluate the decision	3.2	1.1	3.8	0.8	3.5	SA
8	make further decision based on the evaluation outcome	3.5	0.7	3.4	0.7	3.45	A
9	employ sound and logical reasoning in decision making.	3.8	0.6	3.6	0.9	3.7	SA
10	consider consequences associated with alternative solutions.	3.6	0.9	3.5	0.8	3.55	SA
11	process available information to arrive at a conclusion.	3.7	0.7	3.8	0.6	3.75	SA
12	think objectively and relates concepts to the goals of organisations	3.5	0.9	3.7	0.8	3.6	SA

\bar{X}_1 = Mean of lectures; SD₁ = Standard deviation of lecturers; \bar{X}_2 = Mean of students; SD₂ = Standard deviation of students; \bar{X}_g = Grand mean; R = Remark; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree

Table 1 shows mean scores by lectures (\bar{X}_1) and those by the students (\bar{X}_2), as well as the grand mean (\bar{X}_g) of both groups. All

the 12 items obtained means of 2.50 and above ($\bar{X} = \geq 2.50$). The 12 items are thus decision-making skills needed by

university Business education students for gainful employment

Table 2: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation of Lecturers and Business Education Students on Problem Solving Skills Needed by University Business Education Students

S/N	Problem solving skills	\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	\bar{X}_g	R
Ability to:							
1	identify and evaluates different solutions to a problem.	3.6	0.9	3.1	0.8	3.35	A
2	understand a problem by breaking it down into smaller parts.	3.3	0.6	3.7	0.6	3.5	SA
3	identify key issues, implications and identify solutions.	3.7	0.8	3.9	0.9	3.8	SA
4	apply knowledge from many different areas in solving a task.	3.5	0.7	3.6	0.7	3.55	SA
5	make complex choices and decisions on pressing problems.	3.6	1.7	3.4	0.1	3.5	SA
6	exercise sound reasoning in understanding and solving problem.	3.9	0.9	3.2	0.9	3.55	SA
7	identify and ask significant questions that clarify various points of view and lead to better solution.	3.8	0.8	3.8	0.5	3.8	SA
8	ability to frame, analyze, synthesize information in order to solve problems	3.4	0.7	3.9	0.8	3.65	SA
9	develop problem solving skill necessary for every job.	3.6	0.9	3.5	1.2	3.55	SA
10	develop problem solving skills for self-reliance.	3.5	0.8	3.4	1.1	3.45	A
11	use inborn problem-solving skills that will serve life purpose	3.8	0.6	3.8	0.9	3.8	SA
12	use problem solving skill necessary for day-to-day job	3.7	0.8	3.5	0.7	3.6	SA

\bar{X}_1 = Mean of lectures; SD₁ = Standard deviation of lecturers; \bar{X}_2 = Mean of students; SD₂ = Standard deviation of students; \bar{X}_g = Grand mean; R = Remark; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree

Table 2 shows mean responses by lectures (\bar{X}_1) and those by the students (\bar{X}_2), as well as the grand mean (\bar{X}_g) of both groups on problem solving skills needed by the students. All the 12 items obtained means of 2.50 and above ($\bar{X} \geq 2.50$). The 12 items are thus problem-solving skills needed by university Business education students for gainful employment.

Table 3: Mean Responses and Standard Deviation of Lecturers and Business Education Students on creativity Skills Needed by University Business Education Students

S/N	Creativity skills	\bar{X}_1	S ₁	\bar{X}_2	S ₂	\bar{X}_g	R
Ability to:							
1	Come up with new and original ideas.	3.1	0.8	3.3	0.8	3.2	A
2	Welcome new ideals and see things in new ways.	3.7	0.6	3.8	0.7	3.75	SA
3	take original ways to challenges.	3.0	0.9	3.6	0.9	3.3	A
4	approach things open-mindedly.	3.6	0.7	3.7	0.6	3.65	SA
5	encourage experimentation of new ideas.	3.3	0.1	3.1	0.8	3.2	A
6	see and identify problems.	3.2	0.9	3.7	0.8	3.45	A
7	generate new ideas and solve a problem in a new way.	3.8	0.5	3.2	1.1	3.5	SA

Table 3 contd.

8	brainstorm potential solution.	3.9	0.8	3.5	0.7	3.7	SA
9	assess ideals and put the best ones into practice.	3.5	1.2	3.8	0.6	3.65	SA
10	find solutions and solve human problems.	3.4	1.1	3.6	0.9	3.5	SA
11	make connections from various pieces of information.	3.8	0.9	3.7	0.7	3.75	SA
12	become aware of something that has never been seen before	3.6	0.7	3.5	0.9	3.55	SA

\bar{X}_1 = Mean of lectures; SD_1 = Standard deviation of lecturers; \bar{X}_2 = Mean of students; SD_2 = Standard deviation of students; \bar{X}_g = Grand mean; R = Remark; A = Agree; SA = Strongly agree

Table 2 shows mean scores by lectures (\bar{X}_1) and those by the students (\bar{X}_2), as well as the grand mean (\bar{X}_g) of both groups. All the 12 items obtained means of 2.50 and above ($\bar{X} = \geq 2.50$). The 12 items are thus creativity skills needed by university Business education students for gainful employment.

Discussion of Findings

The study reveals that the decision-making skills needed by UBES for gainful employment includes ability to identify the problem or decision to be made, identify alternatives/choices in a given situation, seek information on each alternative, consider consequences of each alternative, select/choose the best alternative among others. This study is in line with the study carried out by Rangu, *et al.*, (2024), who noted that decision making is the act of choosing between two or more courses of action. To Kolman (2023), it is the ability to arrive at a conclusion of certainty. Decision making is a selection process where one or two or more possible solutions are chosen to reach the desired goal. It is referring to the choice of the most appropriate solution among possible alternatives. Duncan & Dunifon, (2021) noted that virtually every job involves some level of individual decision making. To the authors certain career paths like business, marketing,

management, retail and psychology are among those that often require a large amount of decision making. Making decisions that produce successful results for one's department or organization makes one look good and makes one promotable for leadership role. Decision making requires the person vested with the responsibility to possess particular skills, of which intelligence is the most important. Experience, on the other hand, throws more light into situation and aids in decision making.

The study further found out that the problem-solving skills needed by UBES for gainful employment include ability to identify and evaluates different solutions to a problem, understand a problem by breaking it down into smaller parts, identify key issues, implications and identify solutions among others. This study corroborated the study of Kaplan & Petta, (2023) who noted that problem-solving skills are the ability to identify problems, brainstorm and analyze answers, and implement the best solutions. In furtherance, the authors noted that an employee with good problem-solving skills is both a self-starter and a collaborative teammate; they are proactive in understanding the root of a problem and work with others to consider a wide range of solutions before deciding how to move forward. Furthermore,

Pachauri & Yadav (2022) asserted that problem solving skill is the ability to proffer solution to complex and emerging problems as it occurs. To them, it is a skill that is very relevant and which a graduate of business education should possess in order to excel greatly in his chosen career and to be gainfully employed in any establishment for sustainable development of the organization. The study also relates to Tang (2018) study who noted that acquisition of problem-solving skills will enable students/graduates of business education identify business problems and become critical thinkers so as to turn the identified business problems into opportunities thereby increase the organization's productivity and sustainability and working collaboratively with other employees in the organization to see to the achievement of the organization's set objective. The finding of the study is also in line with the study of Ajaero (2019) which stated that problem-solving skills for business development and productivity involve critical thinking, understanding of the business, team spirit, decisiveness and courage.

Creativity formation skills needed by university business education students for gainful employment include: ability to come up with new and original ideas, Come up with new and original ideas, welcome new ideals and see things in new ways, approach things open-mindedly, approach things open-mindedly, see and identify problems., generate new ideas and solve a problem in a new way, brainstorm potential solution, assess ideals and put the best ones into practice, find solutions and solve human problems, make connections from various pieces of information and become aware of something that has never been seen

before. This study is in line with the study carried out by Creativity skills according Perry (2024) cover a broad spectrum of logical, emotional, and practical abilities that contribute to the generation of original and innovative ideas, and solutions. These skills enable you to pave the right approach for problem-solving, and innovation. Such skills enable individuals to approach challenges with flexibility and adaptability. (Elizabeth,2024). Furthermore, Jennifer (2023) asserted that creativity skills are the ability to bring something into play that either did not exist before or, at least, is relatively new for its context, using one's initiative to create new ideas which can be made into a reality, showing a strong personal drive and not waiting to be told to do things among others. The finding of the study also align with the study of Andrews & Higson (2022) who conceptualize and identify key individual and business related skills and competencies required by employers of business graduates and holders of other higher level qualifications, to include ability to strategize, pursue and achieve certain goals with available resources, prevent conflicts and resolve issues as they arise and to discover whether higher education business programmes are meeting the needs of the European marketplace.

Similarly, the findings of the study corroborated the study of Ikpeama, & Nwaokokorom, (2017) when they confirmed that creativity is a mental process undertaken by an individual or group to solve specific problems resulting in the production of statistically infrequent solution which are useful to the society. According to them, creativity obviously involves some form of display of ability to do something and most often

in a new way. It involves developing problem solving skills, evolving new technologies and ways of solving problem. Possession of creativity formation skill gives rise to self and gainfully employment (Bortz, 2017).

Conclusion

This study identified the three sets of soft skills that are needed by Business education students for gainful employment. These include decision making, problem solving and creativity skills. The acquisition of these groups of soft skills will enable students of Business education function effectively in the current highly competitive environment and strong market forces to turn business problems into business opportunities. Based on the findings made Business education students strongly need decision making, problem solving and creativity skills so as to be gainful employed upon graduation from public schools in Enugu State.

Recommendations

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

1. The soft skills identified by this study should be infused into university curriculum of Business education.
2. Opportunity to imbibe decision making, problem solving and creativity skills identified in this study should be given to students.
3. Students should be given opportunity to be part of decisions makers in their teaching and learning process through thinking out of the box.

References

Ajaero, T. M. (2019). *Small Business Ideas for Beginners*. My top business ideas.com. Retrieved 27 June 2020.

Bortz, D. (2017). Soft skills to help your career hit the big time retrieved 12th August, 2018 from Monster contributor <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/soft-skills-you-need>

Carroll, R.T. (2017). *Becoming a critical thinker: A Guide for the New Millennium 2nd*

Chertavian, G. (2019). Making sense. What employers really want: Skills get you hired; behavior *Education*. Las Vegas: Pearson.

Duncan, G. J., & Dunifon, R. (2012). Soft skills and long- run labour market success. *Research in labour Economics*, 35, 313-339. *Education*. Las Vegas: Pearson. *Evaluation* 4(3) 1- 4.

Elizabeth, P. A. (2024). How to improve your creative skill and supercharge your resume <https://www.betterup.com/blog/creative-skills>

European Commission (2017), *Entrepreneurship in the EU and beyond EU skills panorama*

(2017). *Entrepreneurial skills*. Retrieved from: http://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EU_SP_A_H_Entrepreneurial_0.pdf

Herrity, J. (2024). What are soft skills with example. <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/soft-skills>

Hodges, D., & Burchell, N. (2023). Business graduate competencies: Employers' views on importance and performance. *Asia Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education*, 4(2), 16-22.

Igbokwe, S. A. (2019). *Business education principles and methods* revised Edition. Enugu: Jones Communication Publishers.

Ikpeama, F. U., & Nwaokokorom, O. W. (2017). Entrepreneurship opportunities in business education as a means of reducing social vices. *Journal of Professional Secretaries and Office Administrators*, 25(1), 128-138.

Jennifer, H. (2023) What Are Soft Skills? Definition, Examples and Resume Tips <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/resumes-cover-letters/soft-skills>

Kenton, W., David, K., & Eichler, R. (2024). What are soft skills? Definition, importance and example.

- <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/s/soft-skills.asp>
- Kaplan, Z & Petta, R. (2023). What are problem-solving skill? Definition and example.
<https://www.theforage.com/blog/skills/problem-solving-skills>
- Kolman, C. C. (2023). What are soft skills
<https://resources.workable.com/hr-terms/what-are-soft-skills>
- Mfam, I. K & Ntino, S. O (2018). *Basic vocational business education in Nigeria* volume I. Calabar: Ethereal Bliss Printer.
- Nwangwua, I.G.O. (2020). Entrepreneurship in education concepts and constraint. *African Journal of Education and Development Studies*. 4(1), 196-207
- Odu, O. K. (2019). Skills Acquisition in Nigerian Education System: Problems and Prospects in Technical Education. *Journal of Qualitative Education*, 6(1), 20-36.
- Okanazu, O. O., & Okanazu, P. U. (2023). Influence of business education training on the acquisition of innovative skills for global job placement. *Nigerian Journal of Business Education (NIGJBED)* 10(2) 367 - 379.
- Okanazu, O. O., Madu, M. A & Anyakoha, C. N (2017). Challenges of meeting information and communication technology need of business education lecturers in Universities in Enugu State. *Computer Education Research Journal (CERJ)*, 4(1) 65-76.
- Okorie, J. U. (2021). *Entrepreneurship Nigeria's workforce*. Calabar: Macaky Environs.
- Okoye, A. C. (2017). Strategies considered effective by business educators for teaching entrepreneurship education in tertiary institutions in Anambra state. *International Journal of Social Sciences and humanities Reviews*, 7(1), 65 - 71.
- Pachauri, D. & Yadav, A. (2022). Importance of soft skill in teacher education program, *International Journal of education Research and Technology*, 5(1), 22 -25.
- Perry, E. C (2024). Creative Skills: Introduction, Examples, Development, and Improvement Tips
<https://diffr.co/blog/creative-skills/>
- Rangu, G. V, K., Raju, K. V. S & Jagammadha, T. S (2024). Decision making skills Gokaraju Rangaraju Institute of Engineering and Technology. Small Serie.
- Tang, K. N., (2018). The importance of soft skills acquisition by teachers in higher education institutions, *Kasetsart Journal of Social Science*, 1(1), 1-6.
- Uloko, M., E. (2018). Skill Acquisition in Nigeria Educational System through Home Economics Education. *Journal of Qualitative Education*, 6 (1). 20-26.