Problem-Solving and Self-Managemenr Skills Required for Effective Job Performance of Business Education Graduates as Perceived by Business Educators

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Abstract

The study is a survey of problem-solving and self-management skills required for effective job performance of business education students in southeast Nigeria. Three research questions and three null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study. A four point, structured questionnaire constructed by the researcher with a reliability coefficient of 0.69 was used to collect data. The entire population of eighty-eight (88) business educators in the public universities in southeast Nigeria was considered affordable by the researcher; therefore, no sampling was made. 88 copies of the questionnaire were administered on the respondents but only 62 were correctly filled and returned thereby stabilizing the number of respondents at 62. Mean and z-test statistics were used to analyze collected data. While mean was used to answer the research questions, z-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The results identified nine problem-solving skills and nine self-management skills required for effective job performance of business education graduates. The study also found that setting good examples by the teacher, setting reachable goals with the students, activity based teaching, allowing students direct themselves, teamwork, learner centred approach and guiding students to solve problems are good strategies for teaching problem-solving and self-management skills. Integration of problem-solving and self-management skills into the business education curriculum and setting good examples by business educators were recommended among others.

Keywords: business education, problem-solving, self-management, job performance

1. Introduction

Education is an instrument per excellence for global change as well as positive growth and development in all facets of national and individual life. The level of development of a nation varies directly with the level of its education; no nation can develop above the level of its education. A nation that neglects its education system does that to its peril. Federal Republic of Nigeria (FRN, 2013) described education as a veritable tool that enables recipients to fully develop their potentialities through acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes that will render the recipients useful to self and society.

Business education is an aspect of vocational and technical education which FRN in Oladunjoye (2016) described as an integration of disciplines which enable recipients acquire, develop and inculcate right type of values for the survival of the human person. Similarly, Ile, Odimmega and Azu (2016) described business education as that education programme which content and process prepare recipients to play roles as employees, employers, intrapreneurs and entrepreneurs. In the same vein, Ezeani and Ogundola (2016) opined that business education is a course which equips its products with knowledge and competences needed to enter and triumph in all business occupations. Considering the placement of the products of business education, Iwu (2016) opined

that the principal objective of business education is the production of business educators, office administrators, secretaries, and business men and women. Again, Olise and Ulisan (2016) described business education as a critical programme that equips learners with the competences that will enable them fit into the dynamic demands of the economy and employers.

For business education graduates to succeed, the need to possess adequate problem-solving skills; they should be able to identify and solve relevant problems. Problem-solving skills are rated among the most critical skills required by young graduates to succeed. Emeasoba and Nwatarali (2020) posited that one of the objectives of education in the 21st century is the production of graduates who are capable of utilizing their knowledge in problem solving, developing strategies, and transferring knowledge. Incebacat and Ersoy (2016) opined that problem-solving skills are priceless assets especially in the area of education since healthy societies sustain their being by using problem-solving skills to project themselves to better conditions. In the light of the above, Emeasoba and Nwatarali (2020) applauded problem=solving as a critical asset to employers because:

- It involves creative thinking that enables people to plan and organize effectively;

- It includes the ability to innovate and invent which may lead to discovering new ways of doing things better; and

- Critical and logical thinking used for the examination of the state of affairs lead to rational decision and then problem solving.

Saygili (2017) described problem-solving as a positive approach towards an uncertain objective which requires such critical skills as creativity, emotional intelligence, decision making skills, research skills and risk management skills to accomplish. In the same vein, Cai and Lester (2010) described problem-solving as a multiplex exercise that demands: understanding the problem, making choice from available items of information, and taking some actions to reach the goal. However, Saygili in Emeasoba and Nwatarali (2020) identified six stages of practical problem solving as:

➢ Problem identification which refers to the awareness of the problem and determining the essence of the problem;

➢ Structuring the problem which refers to making an indepth study or examination of the problem in order to understand it more;

➢ Looking for possible solutions which involves generation of lines of action that may lead to the solution of a problem either in person or by seeking the opinions of other parties;

➢ Decision making which implies thorough examination of probable lines of action and choosing the best for implementation;

➢ Implementation implies assenting to and putting into practice, the selected line of action; and

➢ Monitoring/seeking feedback is the final stage that involves examining the results of using the selected line of action for some period of time.

Abazou (2016) gave stages of problem-solving that are not far from those of Saygili but the former emphasized that problem-solving leads to learning of lessons. Abazou enthused that possession of problem-solving skills would actually lead to efficient job performance and enhanced service delivery. In the same vein, Gomez (2017) posited that possession of problem-solving skills equips graduates to resist being overwhelmed by problems or depending on other people to solve their problems. Gomez explained that with systematic approach and correct mindset, even the most complex problem can be solved.

In order to efficiently apply problem-solving skills, one should be able to manage oneself; after all, charity begins at home. Self-management is the act of consciously and productively controlling ones behaviours, emotions and thoughts. It is not a common feat because it demands some special skills. Self-management skill is therefore, the ability to consciously and constructively handle one's behaviours, emotions and thoughts. In line with the above, Munro (2021) opined that self-management skills refer to the abilities to be aware of what to do and how to act in different situations. Again, Munro explained that a person with strong self-management skills knows how to control anger, how to avoid distractions, how to stay focused and productive. In concert, Emeasoba and Nwatarali (2020) believed that self-management is a wide area that covers a lot of attitudes, experiences, qualities and skills. Emeasoba and Nwatarali listed the contents of self-management to include: situation analysis; identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT); time management; management of emotions; surviving while in distress; and management of change.

Still in line with contemporaries, Munro (2021) opined that self-management can be regarded as self regulation since it is rooted in emotional intelligence. Munro then explained that self regulation rests on people's ability for self awareness, which enables them to consciously manage their thoughts, desires and emotions. Similarly,

Cooks-Campbell (2021) described emotional intelligence as the ability to understand feelings and how they influence how people think and act. Cooks-Campbell explained that people with high emotional intelligence can, through their understanding of personal and other people's emotions, decide what actions to take and recognize that other people will react in different ways. People with high emotional intelligence comfortably use many and varied strategies to realize and manage their personal emotions which they experience openly.

Greater part of what we call self management, according to Cooks-Campbell, is emotional control which critically affects the workplace. The implication of this fact is that emotional intelligence is materially at the centre of self control. However, this becomes more convincing when we realize that all major elements of emotional intelligence (self awareness, social awareness, and relationship management) have serious implications for self management.

The role of self management cannot be over stressed; that is why every graduate needs to have developed reasonable amount of self management skills before going to the labour market. Munro (2021) presented the following as the seven skills to increase self management:

- Role clarity which implies being fully aware of how one fits into the system and how one's activities influence the entire organization;

- Goal alignment involves the cooperation of members in order to achieve a common goal;

- Strategic planning involves having the knowledge of one's specific role(s) toward the achievement of organizational goals;

- Priority setting involves arranging actions in order towards the achievement of goals;

- Self awareness is the ability to deliberately review ones thoughts, desires and emotions in order to control behaviours and positively impact performance;

- Emotional regulation is an outgrowth of self awareness that enables a person to control his/her feelings through rational thinking; and

- Self care involves taking care of oneself in order to be at one's best so as to do one's best.

Problem-solving and self-management skills affect both individual and organizational job performance. Skills inherent in problem solving (creativity, innovative, critical thinking, logical thinking, emotional intelligence, decision making, risk management, etc.) naturally improve job performance. In the same vein, self awareness, social awareness and relationship management that are inherent in self-management, no doubt, influence job performance positively.

Test Gorilla (2021) identified six problem-solving skills that influence job performance as listening skills, analytical skills, creative thinking skills, communication skills, decision making skills and teamwork. According to Test Gorilla, analytical thinking enables workers to determine the strengths of probable solutions in order to select the most practical, creative thinking enables them to discover innovative and progressive solutions to problems, while decision making equips them to make confident decisions. Finally, Test Gorilla advised employers to always look for employees who have problem-solving skills.

On the other hand Linman (2010) observed that self-management skills are conditions sine qua non for people who want to be more productive at workplace. Linman explained that acquisition of self-management skills before entry into job will spare organizations huge sums of money and energy spent on employee training and improvement. Furthermore, Linman enthused that self-management skills lead to career promotion, professional advancement and better productivity. Positive Action (2021) did not just observe the positive effect of self-management on job performance, but went ahead to highlight the following as self-management strategies:

- Goal setting which demands cooperation between students and teachers in setting micro, reachable goals for students.

- Behaviour monitoring that talks about students observing and recording own behaviour and, redirecting themselves when need arises.

- Self reinforcement considered necessary because rewarding positive action increases the chances of repeating the action.

- Self evaluation which helps students and teachers to gain self confidence through identifying where they need to improve on and by teaching students the efficacy of perseverance and resilience.

Problem-solving and self-management skills are better developed in school for business education graduates to be ready from day one of entry into workplace. This implies that business educators should inculcate these skills in the students. Waterford.org (2020) opined that a teacher can teach problem-solving and self-management skills by setting a good example. In agreement with the above, Morin (2021) explained that students learn most

by watching teachers and opined that teachers should be model problem solvers as well as model self managers. Again, Waterford.org explained that when a teacher openly talks about feelings in the class, students would be encouraged to express their own feelings. Similarly, Watwrford.org again posited that teachers should correct students with positive examples and also teach them skills for managing their negative feelings. In the same vein, Positive Action (2021) stated that problem-solving and self-management skills are better taught through a learner-centric approach – making students to take active part in their education. Again, Positive Action advised teachers to use self-management tools in the class, such as time management logs, checklists and rubrics, rating scales, contracts or agreements, and behaviour report cards. Morin (2021) prescribed problem based approach where the teacher presents a problem and guides the students to solve the problem themselves. Morin gave a five-step formula to problem solving including problem identification, developing not less than five possible solutions, identifying the pros and cons of each solution, selecting a solution and testing it out. Morin advised teachers to guide students to solve their problems rather than solving the problems for the students. Edgenuity (2021) posited that activity based approach should be used in teaching problem-solving and self-management skills since it motivates students to learn and helps them to acquire knowledge and master skills.

One of the cardinal aims of business education is to equip graduates with right skills that will arm them for success in workplace (FRN, 2012). The importance of problem-solving and self-management skills makes it imperative that they be included in the critical skills to be inculcated into business education graduates. Without problem-solving and self-management skills, business education graduates may need some retraining to fully match 21st century world of work. Hence this study examined problem-solving and self-management skills required for effective job performance of business education graduates.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Business education programme is expected to equip its products with skills that will enable them fit into the dynamic demands of the economy and the employers of labour. Business education graduates require many and varied skills to succeed as self employed and employees but, more often than not, problem-solving and self-management skills are neglected. Consequently, business education programme produces graduates who may not consciously control their own behaviours, emotions and thoughts nor personally identify and solve relevant problems.

This lacuna may imply creation of mismatch that would cost employers of labour a fortune on retraining of employees. Business education graduates themselves may spend both money and energy to acquire these skills after graduation in order to fit into the dynamic demands of the economy. On the above premise, the researcher carried out this study to identify problem-solving and self-management skills that would be inculcated to enhance the job performance of business education graduates and, as well, establish efficacious strategies for teaching the skills.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to examine problem-solving and self-management skills required for effective job performance of business education graduates in Southeast Nigeria. Specifically, the study set out to:

1. Identify problem-solving skills required for effective job performance of business education graduates in southeast Nigeria;

2. Identify self-management skills required for effective job performance of business education graduates in southeast Nigeria;

3. Determine the strategies for the teaching of problem-solving and self-management skills.

1.3 Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the problem-solving skills required for effective job performance of business education graduates in southeast Nigeria?

2. What are the self-management skills required for effective job performance of business education graduates in southeast Nigeria?

3. What are the strategies for the teaching of problem-solving and self-management skills?

1.4 Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance guided the study:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female business educators on the problem-solving skills required for effective job performance of business education graduates in southeast Nigeria.

2.   There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female business educators on the self-management skills required for effective job performance of business education graduates in southeast Nigeria.

3.   There is no significant difference between the mean ratings of male and female business educators on the strategies for the teaching of problem-solving and self-management skills.

1.5 Method

Descriptive survey design was used for the study. The population of the study comprised fifty-seven (57) male business educators and thirty-one (31) female business educators totalling eighty-eight (88) business educators in the public universities in Southeast Nigeria that offer business education. The researcher considered the population affordable and distributed 88 copies of the questionnaire but only 62 were correctly filled, returned and eventually used for the study. Hence, the sample size became 62 (41 males and 21 females).

A structured, four-point scale questionnaire constructed by the researcher was used for data collection. The questionnaire was made up of parts A and B. Part A was designed to elicit information on personal data of the respondents while part B comprised three clusters meant to answer the three research questions. Clusters one and two covering items 1 – 9 and 10 – 18 designed to answer research questions 1 and 2 have response modes of very highly required (VHR), highly required (HR), required (R) and seldomly required (SR). In the same vein, cluster three covering items 19 – 25 designed to answer research question 3 has response mode – strongly agree (SA), agree (A), disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). The questionnaire validated by three (3) experts was administered on business educators of three (3) private universities in the southeast to establish the reliability. Using Cronbach Alpha, data collected from the trial test yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.69 proving the instrument reliable for the study.

The 62 copies of the questionnaire that were returned by the respondents were used for data analysis. Mean was used to answer the research questions while z-test statistics was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

2. Results

2.1 Research Question 1

What are the problem-solving skills required for effective job performance of business education graduates in southeast Nigeria?

Items 1-9 in section B of the research instrument were used to answer this research question. The data are summarized on table 1 below.

Table 1. Mean ratings of respondents on problem-solving skills required for effective job performance

S/N	Problem-solving skills required for effective performance of business education graduates	$\overline{X}$	SD	Interpretation
1	Ability to identify a problem	3.11	0.76	Required
2	Ability to think creatively	3.17	0.74	Required
3	Ability to innovate	3.35	0.79	Required
4	Ability to think logically	3.12	0.81	Required
5	Ability to analyze situations	2.91	0.86	Required
6	Ability to examine a problem for more understanding	3.0	0.81	Required
7	Ability to generate lines of action that may lead to solution	3.16	0.73	Required
8	Ability to choose the best line of action	3.33	0.82	Required
9	The firmness to practice the selected action	3.33	0.89	Required

The result in table 1 above shows that the mean scores of the respondents ranged within 2.91 and 3.35; all the items had a mean score above the benchmark of 2.50. The implication of this result is that the respondents perceived that the nine items are problem-solving skills required for effective job performance of business education graduates in the area.

Table 2. z-test Comparison of the mean ratings of male and female business educators on problem-solving skills required for effective job performance

Group	N	X̄	SD	Zcal	Zcrit	Decision
Male	41	1.96	0.44			
Female	21	2.11	0.51	1.22	1.68	Accept

The result in Table 2 above reveals that the calculated z-value of 1.22 is less than the critical z-value of 1.68. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female business educators on problem-solving skills required for effective job performance of business education graduates in southeast Nigeria.

2.2 Research Question 2

What are the self-management skills required for effective job performance of business education graduates in southeast Nigeria?

Items 10 – 18 in section B of the research instrument were used to answer this research question. The data are summarized on table 3 below.

Table 3. Mean ratings of respondents on self-management skills required for effective job performance

S/N	Self-management skills required for effective performance of business education graduates	X̄	SD	Interpretation
10	Ability to control personal emotions	2.87	0.92	Required
11	Ability to control personal thoughts	2.83	0.81	Required
12	Ability to control personal behavior	2.98	0.79	Required
13	Ability to manage stress	2.93	0.81	Required
14	Ability to control anger	2.93	0.91	Required
15	Ability to avoid distractions	2.56	0.86	Required
16	Ability to monitor behaviour	3.14	0.82	Required
17	Ability to analyze situations	2.96	0.79	Required
18	Ability to manage time	2.96	0.91	Required

Table 3 reveals that the mean scores of the respondents ranged within 2.56 and 3.14; each of the items scored above the benchmark (2.50). This implies that the respondents perceived that the nine items on the table are self-management skills required for effective job performance of business education graduates in southeast Nigeria.

Table 4. z-test Comparison of the mean ratings of male and female business educators on self-management skills required for effective job performance

Group	N	X̄	SD	Zcal	Zcrit	Decision
Male	41	2.66	0.47			
Female	21	2.65	0.42	0.77	1.68	Accept

Table 4 above reveals that the calculated z-value of 0.77 is less than the critical z-value of 1.68. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female business educators on self-management skills required for effective job performance of business education graduates in southeast Nigeria.

2.3 Research Question 3

What are the strategies for the teaching of problem-solving and self-management skills?

Items 19 – 25 in section B of the research instrument were used to answer this research question. The data are summarized on table 5 below.

Table 5. Mean ratings of respondents on the strategies for the teaching of problem-solving and self-management skills?

S/N	strategies for the teaching of problem-solving and self-management skills	$\overline{X}$	SD	Interpretation
19	Setting good examples by teachers	3.09	0.83	Agree
20	Cooperating with students in setting reachable goals	3.08	0.81	Agree
21	Making lessons activity based	3.27	0.93	Agree
22	Allowing students direct themselves where necessary	3.11	0.80	Agree
23	Encouraging teamwork	3.32	0.92	Agree
24	Taking learner-centric approach to teaching	3.51	0.74	Agree
25	Guiding students to solve their own problems	3.43	0.76	Agree

The result in table 5 above shows that the mean scores ranged within 3.08 and 3.51; every item in this table scored above 2.50 (the benchmark). This implies that the respondents perceived that the seven strategies on this table are good for the teaching of problem-solving and self-management skills.

Table 6. z-test Comparison of the mean ratings of male and female business educators on the strategies for the teaching of problem-solving and self-management skills

Group	N	$\overline{X}$	SD	Zcal	Zcrit	Decision
Male	41	3.27	0.15			
					1.68	Accept
Female	21	3.29	0.17	1.45		

Table 6 above shows that the calculated z-value of 1.45 is less than the critical z-value of 1.68. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female business educators on the strategies for the teaching of problem-solving and self-management skills in southeast Nigeria.

3. Discussion

The findings of the study were discussed under the following subheadings: problem-solving skills required for effective job performance, self-management skills required for effective job performance and strategies for the teaching of problem-solving and self-management skills.

4. Problem-Solving Skills Required for Effective Job Performance

The study identified nine problem-solving skills required for effective job performance of business education students. The skills identified are problem identification, creative thinking, innovation, logical thinking, situation analysis, probing, emotional intelligence, decision making and firmness. This finding agrees with that of Emeasoba and Nwatarali (2020) which held that problem-solving involves creative thinking, ability to innovate, critical and logical thinking. The finding also agrees with the findings of Cai and Lester (2010) which added decision making as one of the problem-solving skills. It, as well, agrees with that of Saygili (2017) which named skills critical to problem-solving as creativity, emotional intelligence, decision making, research and risk management. Male and female business educators did not differ significantly on problem-solving skills required for effective job performance of business education students.

5. Self-Management Skills Required for Effective Job Performance

The study identified nine self-management skills that are critical for effective job performance of business education students. The skills identified include emotion control, emotional intelligence, dynamism, stress management, change management, focus, behaviour monitoring, analyticity and time management. These findings are in tune with the opinion of Munro (2021) that people with strong self-management know how to control anger, avoid distractions and stay focused. The findings also agree with those of Emeasoba and Nwatarali (2020) that included situation analysis, time management, management of emotion, stress management and change management. The findings again agree with the opinions of Munro (2021) and Cooks-Campbell (2021) that self-management is deeply rooted in emotional intelligence. There was no significant difference between the

opinions of male and female business educators on self-management skills required for effective job performance of business education students.

6. Strategies for Teaching Problem-Solving and Self-Management Skills

The study found seven strategies for teaching problem-solving and self-management skills. The strategies include: setting good examples by the teacher, setting reachable goals with the students, activity based teaching, allowing students direct themselves, teamwork, learner centred approach and guiding students to solve problems. These findings agree with the findings of Waterford.org (2020) and Morin (2021) that these skills could be taught through setting good examples by the teacher. The findings also agree with the opinions of Positive Action (2021) and Edgenuity (2021) which respectively prescribed learner-centred and activity-based approaches to the teaching of these skills. Male and female business educators did not differ significantly on the strategies for teaching these skills.

7. Conclusion

Problem-solving and self-management skills are critical for effective job performance of business education students. Nine problem-solving skills, nine self-management skills and seven strategies for teaching problem-solving and self-management skills were identified. These skills should be inculcated into the students so as to facilitate their entry and advancement in the profession. Activity-based, learner-centric, teamwork and positive correction are some of the strategies for the teaching of the skills.

8. Recommendations

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

1. Business educators should always set good examples since learners copy teachers' actions faster than their words.

2. Activity based teaching and project method of teaching should be employed to enable students identify and solve problems on their own.

3. Materials required for the teaching of problem-solving and self-management skills should be provided by relevant authorities.

4. Problem-solving and self-management skills should be integrated into the business education curriculum so that all business education students must pass through them before graduation.

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