

BUSINESS EDUCATION COMPETENCES AND GRADUATES' SELF RELIANCE IN AN UNCERTAIN ECONOMY IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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Abstract

This study sought to determine business education competences and graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State. Two research questions were answered and two null hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance. The descriptive survey design was used for this study. The population comprised 35 business education graduates made up of 20 MSc and 15 PhD students of business education of 2023/2024 academic session in the Department of Business Education in the University of Uyo and no sample size was drawn due to the small size of the population. The purposive sampling technique was used for the study. The instrument for data collection for this study was a researcher developed questionnaire titled "Business Education Competences and Graduates' Self Reliance in an Uncertain Economy Questionnaire" (BECGSUEQ). The instrument was subjected to face validation by two experts in the Department of Business Education, University of Uyo. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha reliability method where 0.83 reliability index was obtained. Mean statistics was used to answer the research questions while independent t-test was adopted to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The findings of this study revealed that there is great and significant difference in the mean responses of MSc and PhD students of business education on the extent to which management and marketing competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State. Based on the findings, it could be concluded that business education competences such as management and marketing are determinants for graduates self reliance in an uncertain economy. Therefore, it was recommended among others that Government through National Universities Commission (NUC) should ensure the business education programme is given adequate attention so as to guarantee full implementation of management option of the programme that will equip students with necessary competences of becoming self reliance after graduation.

Keywords: Business Education, Management, Marketing, Uncertain Economy.

Introduction

The collapse in oil prices coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic, ASUU strike, negative cashless policy or redesign naira, and the present fuel subsidy removal is no doubt plunge Nigeria into uncertain economy. Salaudeen *et al.* (2020) stated that uncertain economy is characterized with the decline in the GDP growth per capital of a country, which necessitate degradation in the performances of economic sectors and wrapping-up of manufacturing industries. Therefore, there is no gain saying that the folding up of Jubilee Syringe manufacturing company in Akwa Ibome State is indication of the State's uncertain economy. Education has always been canvassed as one of the most visible ways people could be out of poverty but this assertion seems to be invalid with the increasing number of unemployed university graduates. A university graduate is a person who has completed a university degree course, especially for a first degree. Many graduates from the universities, after the one year National Service starts searching for unavailable jobs. As revealed by Ita and Bassey (2022), a

country that produces thousands of university graduates yearly without commensurate employment opportunities creates a fertile ground for a feeling of frustration among these unemployed graduates. Udukeke and Usoro (2023) argued that the rapid increase in the number of graduates that are churned out of tertiary institutions every year, coupled with the 'British legacy,' has increased the rate of unemployment. Mohammed and Mohammed (2023) lamented that, most university graduates lack competences to work across boundaries on complex, interrelated problems needed for successful entrepreneurship. These have affected the expansion of pool of entrepreneurial talent needed to develop and manage new business ventures upon graduation in Nigeria. As a result, massive graduates are waiting for white collar jobs rather than starting their businesses for self reliance.

Self reliance entails the ability to depend on one's self, one's resources rather than those of others. Solomon and Udoayang (2018) asserted that self-reliance is what individual can do personally. That is relying on one's own abilities and efforts to be independent. Self-reliance is the capacity of an individual to establish a business of his own without depending on someone else. A person who is independent and self-employed is self-reliant. According to Ekong and Ekong (2016), training in school is at variance with what labour market and the contemporary society requires. The focal point is that there is a mismatch between school training and the realities in productive life. Usen et al.(2018) observed that Nigerian graduates could only be self-reliant if they have relevant competences through business education programmes.

Business education is an educational path that equips students with the necessary abilities to thrive in the business world. It offers a combination of theoretical knowledge and practical experiences, allowing students to apply what they learn in the classroom to real-life job scenarios. According to Ikpe (2014), Business Education is widely recognised as a very effective tool for fostering entrepreneurial abilities, generating job opportunities, and enabling individuals to become self-sufficient in contemporary society. Business education is provided to students in tertiary institutions to gain worthwhile knowledge and skills in such areas as accounting, management, marketing, and office technology (Otu et al.,2022). It is no surprise too, that at the roof of a large number of organizational problems is poor business education competencies. Competencies are abilities, knowledge, attitudes and facts necessary for accomplishing tasks. The success of business education programmes can be measured by the performance level of graduates of the programme in the world of work. Business Education enables individuals to acquire the management and marketing competencies for success in self reliance.

According to Otu *et al.* (2022), management is the art of getting things done through people. It is the process of harnessing the diverse resources (materials finance, people and time) in a manner as to achieve what the organization set to achieve. It equally involves good planning, organizing, directing and controlling of workers and materials to effectively and efficiently meet set objectives of an enterprise. Binuomote and Okoli (2015) opined that management competences are to be developed by business education graduates in starting, developing and managing an enterprise. It also includes skills in decision making control and negotiation, essential in creating and growing a new business venture. Solomon and Udoayang (2018) observed that business management competences involve the ability to communicate effectively, ability to make long and short term planning, ability to conduct personal evaluation and knowledge of good human relationship among others. Agbamu (2016) opined that graduates must acquire the ability to identify or recognize a profitable market opportunity, must be able to marshal and commit resources to pursue that opportunity while facing the prospect of risks and must be able to create and operate a business organization that implements the business idea.

Marketing involves identifying the needs of consumers; planning and developing a product or service that satisfies those wants; and determining the best possible price to promote and distribute that product or service thus identifying, anticipating, and satisfying customer requirements. Medeyase (2019) asserted that marketing competences are described as a

marketing spirit and culture that helps entrepreneur actually define a unique identity for their selves and also provide one of the best ways for emerging graduates to define their image in the minds of consumers. Accordingly, Ameh and Ezeahurukwe (2016) opined that marketing involves research, product development, design, and testing, and concentrates primarily on consumers or buyers. When consumers needs and wants have been identified, marketing strategies are developed and designed to educate consumers about important product features with the aim of persuading them to buy it, thereby bringing about consumer satisfaction. Marketing competences, according to Binuomote and Okoli (2015) also covered: define customer's need, deliver product to the customer's door step, capture customer's interest to buy their product, retain customer's patronage, promote product of the organization, communicate marketing ideas through oral presentation, communicate marketing ideas through written presentation, among others.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, Nigeria has been confronted with the challenge of high unemployment among the teeming population. Today, the present state of the Nigerian economy requires every individual to think of the very best alternative means of meeting immediate needs through self reliance which business education competences offered to graduates. It is very certain that unemployment will continue to increase at an alarming rate owing to ill-acquisition of business education competences amongst Nigeria graduates, especially those in Akwa Ibom State. Researches revealed that graduates of business education programme in Akwa Ibom State are among the thousands of graduates faced with unemployment. This could be attributed to the fact that most business education graduates failed to acquire or ignorant of the necessary competences.

Propose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which business education competencies influence graduates' self-reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study sought to determine:

1. the extent to which management competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State.
2. the extent to which marketing competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

1. To what extent does the management competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State?
2. To what extent does the marketing competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State?

Research Hypotheses

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

H₀₁: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of MSc and PhD students of business education on the extent to which management competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in the mean responses of MSc and PhD students of business education on the extent to which marketing competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. It was conducted in Akwa Ibom State. The population of this study comprised 35 business education graduates made up of 20 MSc and 15 PhD business education students of 2023/2024 academic session drawn from the Department of Business Education in University of Uyo. (Source: University of Uyo Admission List of Postgraduate Programme, 2023/2024). The sample size consists of all the 35 respondents of the entire population. The purposive sampling technique was used for this study.

The instrument for data collection for this study was a researcher developed questionnaire titled “Business Education Competences and Graduates’ Self Reliance in an Uncertain Economy Questionnaire” (BECGSUEQ). The instrument was divided into two sections, A and B. Section A reflected the personal data of the respondents while the section B contained information relating to independent variables namely; management and marketing competences on their extent to which they influence graduates’ self reliance. The study adopted a 4-point rating scale where the response option was: Very Great Extent (VGE), Great Extent (GE), Little Extent (LE) and Very Little Extent (VLE). The instrument was face validated by two experts in the Department of Business Education, University of Uyo. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha Reliability Method where the reliability index of 0.83 was yield. The mean statistics was used to answer the research questions while independent t-test was adopted to test the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance. The decision concerning the research questions were determined using upper and lower limit as indicated below: VGE - 3.50 - 4.00, GE - 2.50 – 3.49, LE - 1.50 - 2.49 and VLE - 1.00 - 1.49. In testing the null hypotheses, the p-value was compared with 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1

To what extent does the management competences influence graduates’ self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 1: Mean Responses of Respondents on the extent to which management competences influence graduates’ self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State. n = 35

S/N	Management Competences	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Ability to communicate effectively	3.51	0.55	VGE
2	Ability to make long and short term planning	3.45	0.54	GE
3	Ability to conduct personal evaluation	3.18	0.58	GE
4	Knowledge of good human relationship	3.52	0.53	VGE
5	Ability to identify or recognize a profitable opportunity	3.71	0.49	VGE
6	Ability to commit resources to pursue that opportunity	3.52	0.55	VGE
7	Ability to organize the operations	3.48	0.54	GE
8	Ability to create and operate a business organization that implements the business idea	3.20	0.58	GE
9	Ability to monitor the environment	3.51	0.54	VGE
	Grand Mean	3.45	0.54	GE

Note: VGE=Very great Extent, GE=Great Extent, LE= Little Extent, VLE= Very Little Extent

The result presented in Table 1 showed the summary of mean and standard deviation of the respondents’ response. The result indicated that the mean range of the influence of management competences on graduates’ self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State is between 3.18-3.71 and the mean range is all above the cut-off point of 2.50, as it was observed that the standard deviation range from 0.49-0.58 which are not far away from the mean

as the score cluster around the grand mean of 3.45. This implies that there is a great extent of the influence of management competences on graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Question 2

To what extent does the marketing competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State?

Table 2: Mean Responses of Respondents on the extent to which marketing competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State
n = 35

S/N	Marketing Competences	Mean	SD	Decision
10	Ability to acquire good sales habit	3.72	0.45	VGE
11	Ability to analyze demand and sell the products	3.62	0.52	VGE
12	Ability to capture and retain the attention of customers	3.04	0.72	GE
13	Ability to determine the extent to which a product can sell	3.02	0.55	GE
14	Ability to acquire effective sales techniques	3.12	0.75	GE
15	Ability to carry out effective marketing and information research	3.71	0.45	VGE
16	Knowledge of seasonal fluctuation of goods	3.29	0.64	GE
17	Ability to demonstrate effective sales promotion /advertising	3.84	0.36	VGE
18	Ability to determine why existing products are selling well or poorly	3.47	0.50	GE
19	Ability to understand the interrelationships with products, place, price and promotion	3.84	0.36	VGE
20	Ability to determine when to introduce new products, which the customers need	3.82	0.39	VGE
21	Skills to determine when to allow reasonable credit facilities to trusted customers	2.95	0.76	GE
22	Ability to use good marketing mix	3.77	0.42	VGE
	Grand Mean	3.48	0.53	GE

Note: VGE=Very great Extent, GE=Great Extent, LE= Little Extent, VLE= Very Little Extent

The details in Table 2 showed that the mean range of the influence of marketing competences on graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy is between 2.95-3.77 and the mean range is all above the cut-off point of 2.50, as it was observed that the standard deviation range from 0.36-0.76 which are not far away from the mean as the score cluster around the grand mean of 3.48. This implies that there is a great extent of the influence of marketing competences on graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State.

Null Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of MSc and PhD students of business education on the extent to which management competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 3: Independent t-test analysis of the difference in the mean responses of respondents on the extent to which management competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy MSc students = 20, PhD students = 15

S/N	Items	MSc		PhD		t-cal	p-value	Decision
		students (1)		students (2)				
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
1	Ability to communicate effectively	3.50	0.55	3.61	0.50	0.93	.005	S
2	Ability to make long and short term planning	3.46	0.53	3.29	0.63	-1.33	.000	S
3	Ability to conduct personal evaluation	3.27	0.51	3.71	0.45	-1.14	.000	S
4	Knowledge of good human relationship	3.52	0.53	3.27	0.51	0.02	.001	S
5	Ability to identify or recognize a profitable opportunity	3.71	0.48	3.50	0.56	0.13	.000	S
6	Ability to commit resources to pursue that opportunity	3.38	0.79	3.26	0.87	0.82	.005	S
7	Ability to organize the operations	3.14	0.85	2.88	0.90	1.72	.003	S
8	Ability to create and operate a business organization that implements the business idea	3.59	0.46	3.00	0.88	0.97	.000	S
9	Ability to monitor the environment	3.19	0.89	3.07	0.45	0.93	.000	S

*Significant at P < .05 level.

Table 3 revealed the result of independent t-test analysis of the difference in the mean responses of respondents on the extent to which management competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy. The result showed that there is significant difference in the mean responses of MSc and PhD students of business education on the extent to which management competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy for all the items. Therefore, the null hypothesis one is rejected for all the items since the p-value ranging from .000 to .005 is less than 0.05 level of significance at 33 degree of freedom. Hence, the alternate hypothesis is upheld.

Null Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of MSc and PhD students of business education on the extent to which marketing competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 4: Independent t-test analysis of the difference in the mean responses of respondents on the extent to which marketing competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy
MSc students = 20, PhD students = 15

S/N	Items	MSc students (1)		PhD students (2)		t-cal	p-value	Decision
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
10	Ability to acquire good sales habit	3.70	0.43	3.70	0.43	0.21	.000	S
11	Ability to analyze demand and sell the products	3.79	0.41	3.80	0.41	0.10	.000	S
12	Ability to capture and retain the attention of customers	3.92	0.28	3.98	0.15	0.09	.000	S
13	Ability to determine the extent to which a product can sell	3.86	0.35	3.61	0.49	0.52	.000	S
14	Ability to acquire effective sales techniques	3.89	0.32	3.98	0.15	0.24	.000	S
15	Ability to carry out effective marketing and information research	3.87	0.34	3.89	0.32	0.46	.000	S
16	Knowledge of seasonal fluctuation of goods	3.90	0.30	3.95	0.21	0.24	.000	S
17	Ability to demonstrate effective sales promotion /advertising	3.94	0.24	3.82	0.39	0.46	.000	S
18	Ability to determine why existing products are selling well or poorly	3.94	0.24	3.91	0.29	0.46	.000	S
19	Ability to understand the interrelationships with products, place, price and promotion	2.97	0.90	3.01	0.91	0.30	.000	S
20	Ability to determine when to introduce new products, which the customers need	3.08	0.88	2.93	0.89	1.04	.000	S
21	Skills to determine when to allow reasonable credit facilities to trusted customers	3.76	0.45	2.79	0.92	1.61	.000	S
22	Ability to use good marketing mix	3.07	0.45	3.00	0.88	0.93	.000	S

*Significant at P < .05 level.

Table 4 showed the independent t-test analysis of the difference in the mean responses of respondents on the extent to which marketing competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy. The result showed that there is significant difference in the mean responses of MSc and PhD students of business education on the extent to which marketing competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy for all the items. Therefore, the null hypothesis two is rejected for all the items since the p-value ranging from

.000 to .00 is less than 0.05 level of significance at 33 degree of freedom. Hence, the alternate hypothesis is upheld.

Discussion of Findings

Management Competences and Graduates' Self Reliance in an Uncertain Economy

The findings on research question one and null hypothesis one revealed that there is great and significant difference in the mean responses of MSc and PhD students of business education on the extent to which management competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State. This finding corroborated with the finding of Agbamu (2016) who found that graduates must acquire the ability to identify or recognize a profitable market opportunity, must be able to marshal and commit resources to pursue that opportunity while facing the prospect of risks and must be able to create and operate a business organization that implements the business idea. This also supported that of Solomon and Udoayang (2018) who said that management competences involve the ability to communicate effectively, ability to make long and short term planning, ability to conduct personal evaluation and knowledge of good human relationship among others. This implies that acquisitions of management competences are paramount for graduates self reliance in Akwa Ibom State.

Marketing Competences and Graduates' Self Reliance in an Uncertain Economy

The findings on research question two and null hypothesis two revealed that there is great and significant difference in the mean responses of MSc and PhD students of business education on the extent to which marketing competences influence graduates' self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State. This finding is in line with the finding of Medeyase (2019) who maintained that marketing competences could be described as a marketing spirit and culture that helps entrepreneur actually define a unique identity for their selves and also provide one of the best ways for emerging graduates to define their image in the minds of consumers. This finding is agreed with that of Binuomote and Okoli (2015) who revealed the competencies to include; define customer's need, deliver product to the customer's door step, capture customer's interest to buy their product, retain customer's patronage, Also, marketing competences make available opportunities for individuals to explore their potentials and initiatives for greatness, which in turn builds their self-reliance in the race of life. This implies that acquisitions of marketing competences are essential for self-reliance of business education graduates in Akwa Ibom State.

Conclusion

Based on the finding of this study, it could be concluded that business education competences such as management and marketing are determinants for graduates self reliance in an uncertain economy in Akwa Ibom State. The findings revealed that management and marketing competences influence graduates self reliance in an uncertain economy to a great extent.

Recommendations

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

1. Government through National Universities Commission (NUC) should ensure the business education programme is given adequate attention so as to guarantee full implementation of management option of the programme that will equip students with necessary competences of becoming self reliance after graduation.
2. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria should be mandated to collaborative relationship between professional marketers and business education lecturers in the institution to ensure a proper dissemination of marketing competencies to students for effective experience upon graduation.

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