
SOFT SKILLS AS A PANACEA FOR ENHANCING EMPLOYABILITY OF SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS OF ACCOUNTING EDUCATION IN THE FEDERAL COLLEGE OF EDUCATION (TECHNICAL) BICHI, KANO STATE

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to determine the extent through which soft skills serve as a panacea for enhancing employability of special needs students of accounting education, in Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State. To achieve this objective, two research questions and two null hypotheses were raised to guide the study at .05 level of significance. The study adopted a descriptive survey design. A total population for the study was eighty-eight (88) special needs students. The entire population was studied due to its manageable size. The researcher structured questionnaire titled "Soft skills and employability Questionnaire (SSEQ)" was used to collect data for the study. The instrument was subjected to face validation by three research experts. Cronbach alpha was used to determine the reliability and internal consistency of the instrument which yielded an r value of .798. Data was collected by the researcher and three assistants who were briefed before embarking on the collection. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while t-test was used to analyze the null hypotheses. It was discovered that soft skills of problem solving and critical thinking significantly influence employability of special needs students to a high extent. It was recommended that special needs students should intensify their efforts in acquiring more soft skills to boost their chances of getting employed.

Keywords: Soft Skills, Enhancing, Employability and Special Needs.

Introduction

Nigeria as a country is battling with the worst rate of unemployment in recent history. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2014), the unemployment rate in Nigeria stands at 5.0 %. This value represents both the unemployed and the under-employed. Putting it into context, the unemployment rate without underemployment exclusively is 44.32% (Okarafor; 2024). One of the core objectives of the accounting education option of the general business education programme is to impart financial skills to help boost employment and improvement of the general living conditions.

Accounting education can be defined by Bassey, Udo and Obayi (2024) as a body of study that inculcate skills, attitudes and knowledges on the process of identifying, classifying, recording and interpreting financial positions of business enterprises to stakeholders for financial decisions making. Ido and Bassey (2016) defined accounting education as a programme of study that is aimed at transmitting business skills for and about job generation. Witte (2019) opined that the accounting education option of the general business education programme is to boost entrepreneurship development that would drive employment generation of graduates.

The accounting education programme provides marketable skills both in hard and soft form to students of the programme to aid employability upon graduation. The programme offers both hard and soft skills to students to prepare them for the ever-competitive labour market. Soft skills is the type of skills that deals mostly with intuition and intellectualism rather the use of the hand and brain. Ido and Bassey (2016) opined that business education skills are classified into two forms; hard and soft skills. The hard skills deal with the psychomotor domain while the soft skills are the cognitive levels kind of skill. Ono (2019) summarize the skills into the hand impose and the brain impose skills. The hand imposes skill entails the use of hands and physical attributes of the students in learning. With special considerations, soft skills can be classifying into the problem-solving skill, critical thinking skill, time management skill, among others.

Scholars like Edwin (2019), Benson (2020) and Ade (2022) have all accepted the fact that accounting education is an antidote to the problem of unemployment through the inculcation of entrepreneurship oriented soft and hard skills on the students to enable these students to be employers of labour and at same time create wealth. Akpan (2017) emphasized that the goals of Accounting Education are to create production through skills acquisition in office occupations and industrial relations, skills acquisition in service delivery, skill acquisition in information technology and management and production capabilities in entrepreneurship drive. Oftentimes, entrepreneurship and employability become the end product of the accounting education content.

Skills in accounting education can be classified into both soft and hard skills. According to Young and Bassey (2022), hard skills are those classes of skills that have physical features and can be contacted through the sense organs. They include the typing skills, analytical skill, transcript-ion skill, computational skill among others. On the other hand, the digital soft skills are mostly cognitive in nature while in contrast the hard skills

are skills that are psychomotor in nature. The soft skills include but not limited to forecasting skill, problem solving skill, critical thinking skill, negotiating skill, manipulative skill and balancing skill. These soft skills are usually applied when situations arise. With respect to the entrepreneurship and employability development of the business education(accounting) student, the core digital soft skills that accounting education can impart effectively are the forecasting skill, negotiating skill critical thinking skills and problem-solving skill. Problem solving skill to Ido and Bassey (2017) is a skill that helps the individual to determine the source of a problem and find an effective solution. Although problem solving is often identified as its own separate skills, there are other related skills that contribute to this ability. Some of the problem-solving skills includes active listening, analysis, research, creativity, communication, dependability, decision-making and team building. Problem-solving skills are the ability to identify problems, brainstorm and analyze answers, and implement the best solutions. 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. Examples of using problem-solving skills in the workplace include: Researching patterns to understand why revenue decreased last quarter, experimenting with a new marketing channel to increase website sign-ups, brainstorming content types to share with potential customers, testing calls to action to see which ones drive the most product sales, implementing a new workflow to automate a team process and increase productivity

Problem-solving skills are the most sought-after soft skill of 2022. In fact, 86% of employers look for problem-solving skills on student resumes, according to the National Association of Colleges and Employers Job Outlook 2022 survey. (Zoe Kaplan, Emily Courtney & Racheal Pelta 2023) It's unsurprising why employers are looking for this skill: companies will always need people to help them find solutions to their problems. Someone proactive and successful at problem-solving is valuable to any team. "Employers are looking for employees who can make decisions independently, especially with the prevalence of remoter hybrid work and the need to communicate asynchronously," Eric Mochnacz, senior HR consultant at Red Clover, says. "Employers want to see individuals who can make well-informed decisions that mitigate risk, and they can do so without suffering from analysis paralysis."

Problem-solving skills help one to determine the source of a problem and find an effective solution. Although problem-solving is often identified as its own separate skill,

there are other related skills that contribute to this ability. Problem-solving skills are important in every career at every level. As a result, effective problem-solving may also require industry or job-specific technical skills. For example, a registered nurse will need active listening and communication skills when interacting with patients but will also need effective technical knowledge related to diseases and medications. In many cases, a nurse will need to know when to consult a doctor regarding a patient's medical needs as part of the solution. Researching is an essential skill related to problem-solving. As a problem solver, you need to be able to identify the cause of the issue and understand it fully. You can begin to gather more information about a problem by brainstorming with other team members, consulting more experienced colleagues or acquiring knowledge through online research or courses. "The first step to solving any problem to analyze the situation. One analytical skill will help understand problems and effectively develop solutions. One will also need analytical skills during research to help distinguish between effective and ineffective solutions. Ultimately, one will need to make a decision about how to solve problems that arise. At times—and with industry experience—one may be able to make a decision quickly according to Zoe Kaplan (2023),

Solid research and analytical skills can help those who have less experience in their field. There may also be times when it is appropriate to take some time to craft a solution or escalate the issue to someone more capable of solving it. When identifying possible solutions, one will need to know how to communicate the problem to others. One will also need to know what communication channels are the most appropriate when seeking assistance. Once one finds a solution, communicating it clearly will help reduce any confusion and make implementing a solution easier.

Hanson (2015) opined that problem solving is a prerequisite for an effective entrepreneurship drive. This has necessitated the need for business education programmes to inculcate problem solving skills to the students in order to aid entrepreneurship development.

Problem solving skill entails identifying a problem.

In the form of a gap, a hole and a need which is actually problematic and therefore requires solutions to them. The first journey to problem solving skill is insight. Insight and not ingenuity is the core requirement for problem solving skill to be more effective. In fact, an insightful entrepreneur is a problem solving. According to Orton and Wain in Kurbal (2015), the concept of problem is defined differently in related literature. Problem comes to

mean a situation which attracts problem solver's interest, possess problem solver's mind and directs problem solver to search to reach the solution of problem. Krulik and Rudnich in Kurbal (2015) defined problem as an issue which solution is not known at the beginning. For an issue to be classified to as problem, it must cause the problem solver some difficulty at the start of trying to find solution to the problem. Barki (2016) opined that problems usually disturb the problem solver's balance of cognitive system.

Problem solving is a skill that students ought to and must learn. In fact, problem solving transverse educational qualifications and goes beyond the classroom experiences but can be mastered through solving smaller and complex classroom situations alike. Problem solving skill is central to entrepreneurship discourse. This is because it entails identifying consumer needs, consumer research identification, market survey, problem identification, gap analysis and then solving the problem. Not every business person is a problem solver. Some are in business for profiteering being the main objective of business whereas problem solving goes beyond profiteering but will definitely ensures huge profit in the long run. Problem solving skill to Ido and Bassey (2017) is a skill that helps the individual to determine the source of a problem and find an effective solution. Although problem solving is often identified as its own separate skills, there are other related skills that contribute to this ability. Some of the problem-solving skills includes active listening, analysis, research, creativity, communication, dependability, decision-making and team building.

Forecasting skill is defined by Bassey (2022), as the set of skills that involves analyzing pass data results to predict the future occurrence. Though, prediction in the literary form cannot be equated to forecasting because forecasting is more elaborate and objective than prediction. Forecasting usually involves the utilization of mathematical models to develop pattern that would predict future behaviors and occurrences at a high probability level. Young and Bassey (2021) opined that forecasting as a business education skill can be used to analyze and give an accurate reading of consumer behaviors based on price changes and economic prevailing situations. Forecasting as a business education soft skills are usually applied in the course of predicting business opportunities and growth patterns from past scenarios or through computer simulations.

Computer simulations usually develop models and create real life scenarios where human relationships are assigned numerical values and then segmented and exposed to get real life situations. Moreover, a more important skill that can be imparted by accounting

education is the negotiating skill. Negotiation is a skill. Negotiation is the actual process of bargaining for the value of a job, task or activity. It involves setting priorities in order (Oshmira, 2016). Negotiation involves understanding the concept of ceiling and carpet pricing mechanism. An entrepreneur with poor negotiating skill will find it difficult to break even or even achieve profits. Negotiation also involves scale of preference and trying to achieve the preferential goals and objectives. As an entrepreneur, negotiation can take the form of negotiating for supplies, negotiating for salaries and wages, negotiating for contract, tax rebate among others. Negotiation involves dialogue and most times leads to agreement reached. A combination of these skill sets can help boost the chances of employability of accounting education students

Another core soft skill that accounting education students can acquire is critical thinking skill. Critical thinking to Stamp (2017) is not a matter of accumulating information. A student with a good memory and who know a lot of facts is not necessarily good at critical thinking. A critical thinker is able to know how to make use of information to solve problems and to seek relevant sources of information to inform oneself. Kpokor (2019) opined that critical thinking should not be confused with being argumentative or being critical of other people. Although, critical thinking skills can be used in exposing fallacies and bad reasoning, critical thinking can help students to acquire knowledge, improve theories and strengthen arguments. Critical thinking is the ability to interpret, evaluate, and analyze facts and information that are available, to form argument or decide if something is right or wrong. More than just being curious about the world around you, critical thinkers make connections between logical ideas to see the bigger picture. Building your critical thinking skills means being able to advocate your ideas and opinions, present them in a logical fashion, and make decisions for improvement. Critical thinking is useful in many areas of a student's life, including their career. It makes one a well-rounded individual, one who has looked at all of their options and possible solutions before making a choice. Having critical thinking skills is important because they are: universal, crucial for the economy, essential for improving language and presentation skills, very helpful in promoting creativity, important for self-reflection and the basis of science and democracy. Critical thinking skills are used every day in a myriad of ways and can be applied to situations such as a CEO approaching a group project or a nurse deciding in which order to treat their patients.

The accounting education class has several students from diverse locations and characteristics that differentiate them from other including students with special needs. Benson (2021) opined that special needs students are students who deviate from the normal learning phenomenon of his/her peers. Dennis (2018) opined special need students are those students who find learning very complicated to the extent that it affects their academic performance separately. The special need student is always finding learning a cumbersome and difficult task that it usually affects their academic performance. According to Ido and Bassey (2016), special needs students are classified into students with physical impairments, mentally damaged students and hereditary imposed special need students. oftentimes, these students are given special attention to be able to cope with their counterparts. Most of these students need special aids like braille to be able to function academically with their peers. These students are often pitied and looked down and as such makes them to suffer withdrawal syndrome (Bassey, 2017). It was on this background that this research on soft skills as a panacea for enhancing employability of special needs students of Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State was conducted.

Statement of Problem

The problem of unemployment has really dealt with students and graduates alike. Most graduates leave the university system without any form of skill to enable them get employed in both the formal and informal sector of the country. The National Bureau of Statistics (2024) has placed the level of unemployment to a rate of 5%. Thus, this high level of unemployment is fueled by skill MIS match, poor acquisitions of requisite skills, lack of up-scaling of accounting education soft skills and skill misfit. These have resulted to high crime level, high rate of poverty in the society and other social vices.

Currently many economies are facing fluctuation due to global events, affecting job availability. Some sectors, particularly technology and healthcare, are growing, while others may be struggling. Employers frequently highlight a mismatch between graduates' skills and those required in the job market. There is an increasing demand for digital skills, critical thinking, and adaptability.

Most times graduates and students of special needs are oftentimes stigmatized and segregated in work place which oftentimes result to poor job satisfaction. How many special needs persons are fully equipped to be engaged in this world of information technology? It is not uncommon to find persons with special needs to resort to begging on our streets due to poor and/or low skill set acquisitions which might have fetch them a

gainful job to fuel employability. According to Jameson (2024), the rate of special needs persons unemployment is a staggering 67.8%, which shows that special needs individuals need proper framework for protection at workplace is also a problem of this study. Godwin (2023) had opined that individuals with special needs are oftentimes neglected to the backroom. Some have suffered from discrimination that has affected their employability.

There is also a literature gap in the area of soft skill in enhancing employability of special needs students of Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State. It was against these shortcomings that this research was conducted to fill in the perceived lacuna.

Purpose of the Study

The General purpose of this study was to determine the influence of soft skill on employability of accounting education students of Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State. Specifically, the study sought to determine the influence of:

1. Extent of influence of Problem-solving skill on the employability of special needs students of Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State.
2. Critical thinking skill on the employability of special needs students of Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were asked to guide the entire research studies;

1. To what extent does problem solve skill influences employability of special needs students of Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State?
2. To what extent does critical thinking skill influences employability of special needs students of Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were raised at .05 significant level;

1. There is no significant difference between influence of problem-solving skills and employability of special needs students of Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State.
2. There is no significant difference between influence of critical thinking skill and employability of special needs students of Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State.

Research Methods

A descriptive survey design was used for this study because the researcher was interested in gathering information about the respondents through a structured questionnaire titled "Soft skills and employability Questionnaire (SSEQ).

This study was carried out in Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State, in North-West Nigeria. The reason for choosing Kano state is because the federal college of education have students who are special needs students studying in accounting education without any hope of employment upon graduation. The population is 88 students with special needs in the department of accounting education in the Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State. The entire population was studied due to its manageable size hence, there was no sampling. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled "Soft skills and employability questionnaire (SSEQ) The instrument was developed by the researchers from the purpose of the study.

To ensure the face validity of the instrument copies of the structured questionnaire were given to three experts in the department of accounting education, Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State. Cronbach alpha was used to determine the reliability of the instrument with an r value of .798 which was deemed high enough to be utilized for the study. The data was collected by the researcher with the help of 2 research assistants. A 95% collection rate was achieved by the researcher. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while the t-test was used to analyze the null hypotheses.

Results

Research Question 1

To what extent does problem solve skill influences employability of students in the Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State'?

Table 1: Mean(x) and Standard Deviation (SD) rating of the influence of problem-solving

		N=88		
SIN	Items	\bar{x}	SD	REM.
1	Problem solving skill help to put issues on perspective.	3.54	.86	HE
2	Solving people's problems helps generate revenue.	3.62	.43	HE
3	Ability to solve problem in conflict resolutions.	3.56	.89	HE

4	Problem solving skills is a requisite for employability of students upon graduation.	3.66	.7	HE
5	Accounting problems are hugely financial in nature.	4.00	.33	HE
	Grand Mean	3.66		HE

From the data analysis on Table 1, it can be seen that all the items surpassed the mean rating of 3.00 with a grand mean of 3.66, it implies that problem solving skill influences employability of special needs students to a high extent.

Research Question 2

To what extent does critical thinking skills influence employability of special needs students in Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation testing the influence of critical

		N=88		
S/N	Items	\bar{x}	SD	REM.
I	Critical thinkers are solution givers.	3.12.	.87	
2	Critical thinking helps boost chances of success	3.45	.88	HE
3	Critical thinking helps boost confidence.	3.32	.45	HE
4	Critical thinking solves out of the box issues.	4.00	1.21	HE
5	Critical thinking improves self-worth.	3.32	.09	HE
	Grand Mean	3.44		HE

From the data analysis on Table 2, it can be seen that all the items surpassed the mean cut off point of 3.00 with a grand mean of 3.44, it indicated that critical thinking skill influences employability of special needs students in federal college of education(technical) Bichi to a high extent.

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant influence of problem-solving skills on employability of special needs students of Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State.

Table 3: T test analysis of the influence of problem-solving skills on employability

N = 88						
Variables	\bar{x}	SD	df.	T-cal.	T-crit.	Decision
Problem solving skill	344	76	82	7.56	I .99	Significant
Employability	3.02.	1.23				

From the data analysis on Table 3, it can be seen that the t-cal value of 7.56 was higher than the critical value of I .99, degree of freedom of 86 and at .05 significant level. Based on this, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted therefore, there is a significant influence of problem-solving skills on employability of special needs students in accounting education of the Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant influence of critical thinking skill on employability of special needs students of accounting education, Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State.

Table 4: T-test analysis of the influence of critical thinking skill on employability of special needs

N = 88						
Variables	\bar{x}	SD.	df.	T-cal.	T-crit.	Decision
Critical thinking skill	3.11	1.54.	86.	3.22	1.99.	Significant
Employability	3.02.	I .43				

From the data analysis on Table 4 had shown that the calculated t value of 3.22 was higher than the table t value of 1.99, degree of freedom of 86 at .05 level of significance. This implies that the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted. This means that there exists a significant influence of critical thinking skill on the employability of special needs students of Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State.

The following are the major findings of the study:

1. Problem solving skill acquired by special needs students significantly influence employability to a high extent.

2. Critical thinking skill of special needs students significantly influences employability to a high extent.

Discussion of the Findings

Problem solving skill and employability

Data analysis on Tables 1 and 3 had indicated that there is a significant influence of problem-solving skills on employability of special needs students of accounting education in the Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State. This finding indicated that special needs students who -acquire problem solving skills from studying accounting education has the requisite skill to be employed in both the formal and informal sector. This finding is supported by the findings of Bassey (2022) who opined that problem solving skills is formidable criteria for getting employed in firms. This is because employers employ only individuals who possess problem solving skills. Young and Bassey (2021) agrees with these findings by postulating problem solvers are highly sought after by multi National firms.

Critical thinking skills and employability

Data analysis on Tables 2 and 4 had indicated that there exists a significant influence of critical thinking skill on employability of special needs students to a high extent. This finding implies that critical thinking which is an epitome of making concrete decisions to help develop firms. Critical thinking is very important in ensuring firms move forwards. This assertion is supported by the findings of Benson (2020) who postulated that critical thinking skills are vital for moving corporate organizations to move forward and as such organizations tend to employ such graduates who can work independently and under pressure. Ade (2022) also agrees with the findings of this study by insisting that critical thinkers are creative thinkers who are needed to provide the needed leadership organizations need for growth.

Conclusion

This study on soft skills as panacea for employability of special needs students of accounting education, federal college of education(technical), Bichi. Kano state. The study adopted a survey design where data were collected through a structured questionnaire. "The study had shown that problem solving skills significantly influence employability of special needs students of accounting education, federal college of education and there also exist a

significant influence of critical thinking skill on the employability of special needs students of accounting education, Federal College of Education (Technical) Bichi, Kano State.

Recommendations

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

1. Special need Students of accounting education should intensify their acquisitions of soft skills to enhance their chances of being employed.
2. Curriculum planners of accounting education should make logical reasoning as a core course to improve on their critical thinking skills.
3. The federal government should as a matter of urgency update her policy on special needs students to give them more opportunities to access the labour market.
4. The federal government through the National Council of Colleges of Education should endeavor to provide educational and instructional facilities to accommodate students with special needs.
5. Finally, lecturers should help incorporate testing and measuring soft skills of students in order to strengthen them.

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