



## ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCIES REQUIRED BY BUSINESS EDUCATION GRADUATES FOR SUCCESSFUL ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract:** The need for business education graduates and students (would-be-graduates) to integrate properly into the world of work, in the contemporary business world to avert unemployment necessitated the study, to ascertain the entrepreneurial competencies required by business education graduates for successful entrepreneurial development. The study adopted the survey research design. All the business education graduates who were entrepreneurs in the South East geo-political zone of Nigeria constituted the population. Purposive sampling was used to select 187 entrepreneurs (business education graduates) who were managers of their businesses and had existed for five years and above. A structured questionnaire validated by three experts with a reliability coefficient of 0.84 was the instrument for data collection. Data collected were analyzed using Arithmetic mean and Standard deviation for research questions and z-test to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed that soft skills such as; analytical thinking, critical thinking, among others and hard skills such as; machine operation, software application, among others, were required by business education graduates for successful entrepreneurial development. The findings also revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the respondents on entrepreneurial competencies (soft and hard skills) required for entrepreneurial development as a result of gender. Based on the findings of the study, conclusion was drawn and it was recommended among others that, business education graduates and students should endeavour to imbibe and put into use the identified entrepreneurial competencies for their entrepreneurial development to avert unemployment.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurial competencies, Business Education, Entrepreneurial development, Soft skills, Hard skills.

## 1. Introduction

Tertiary education institutions in Nigeria churn out huge number of graduates (including business education graduates) annually, but so many of these graduates find it difficult to get jobs and earn their living meaningfully, regrettably, they become unemployed. This is a worrisome development as it could be that there is a mismatch in the competencies possessed by these graduates and those needed in the contemporary business and labour world. It could also be attributed to inadequate possession of the required entrepreneurial competencies by these graduates. In the words of Rajadurai, Sapuan, Daud, Salina and Abidin (2018), entrepreneurial competencies should be acquired by students (would-be graduates) at their tertiary level of education and should be applied at the workplace to meet the global enterprise needs. In contrast, many graduates of higher education and other technical and professional courses experience great employability difficulties due to the lack of personal, social and professional skills (Succi & Canovi, 2020). This entails that there could be specific or generic skills which these graduates might need for smooth transition into the contemporary labour world. As Pepple and Enuoh (2020) noted that graduates are expected to have the requisite entrepreneurial competencies to be able to create business value in today's economy. It therefore becomes imperative that the future labour force (students) should be made to acquire those entrepreneurial competencies required in the contemporary business world so as to fit in after graduation either as employees or employers of labour. Acquisition of the required entrepreneurial competencies could help them to maximize the use of existing resources for entrepreneurial development. Entrepreneurial development is the programme of activities that enhance the knowledge, skill, behavior and attitude of individuals and groups to assume the role of entrepreneurs (Osemeke, 2012). It is the process of initiating and sustaining entrepreneurial activities capable of accelerating wealth creation. It aims at enhancing the pace at which new ventures, goods and services are created by maximally utilizing

opportunities. It could also be envisaged when individuals develop new businesses, exploit opportunities or adopt a unique way of producing goods or rendering of services under conditions of risk in order to make profit. Unequivocally, with sharp increase in the number of graduates that are being produced annually, graduates are expected to have the requisite entrepreneurial competencies to be able to create their own jobs and become entrepreneurs.

An entrepreneur is someone who has innovative ability, creates something new and different, seeks opportunities, starts a business, takes risks, develops ideas and manages available resources to succeed (Akeke, Oche, Akuegwu & Ushie, 2022). They are people who search for change and respond to the change by converting it into a profitable opportunity (Eze & Obidile, 2018). Entrepreneurs play vital roles in revitalizing national economies through; creation of new businesses, redesigning of existing businesses and organizing the productive resources of the nation to ensure growth and competitiveness. Entrepreneurs consist of Male and female individuals who have distinguished themselves as employers of labour through maximal utilization of opportunities under conditions of risk to provide goods or render services needed in the society. Male and female entrepreneurs who have been successful in the business for five years and above are believed to have possessed the experience and competencies required for successful entrepreneurial development hence, their survival. They are considered in this study as a result of contradictory results found from other studies, with regards to their contributions towards the entrepreneurial activities. For instance, Botha (2006); Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development, MWFCDC (2014) stated that, female entrepreneurs did not seem to possess the competencies required for business growth, hence their low productivity. Contrary to their findings, Orser and Dyke (2009) found that possession of entrepreneurial competencies needed for successful business operation was independent of gender. Given

the variation in their studies, it becomes necessary to ascertain the responses of male and female business education graduate entrepreneurs on the entrepreneurial competencies required for entrepreneurial development in the contemporary business world, in order to determine if they would differ significantly.

Entrepreneurial competencies are skills, knowledge, behaviours and attitudes required to perform roles effectively (Brophy & Kiely, 2002). They are the entire capabilities an entrepreneur uses to execute his job role fruitfully (Man, Lau & Snape, 2008). Entrepreneurial competencies are learned and personal traits, skills, knowledge and values that can help an individual to exploit opportunities, develop valuable and innovative ideas, products or services to solve problems. Possession of the required entrepreneurial competencies is very important for successful entrepreneurial activities. Entrepreneurial activities are resourceful activities that are capable of making an individual self-reliant, independent and productive in meeting one's life challenges. They could accelerate economic growth and development. Entrepreneurial activities could be successfully implemented with adequate possession of entrepreneurial competencies (Boldureanu, G. Ionescu, Bercu, Bedrule-Grigoriu & Boldureanu, D., 2020). Previous studies have attempted to categorize entrepreneurial competencies. For instance, Man, Lau and Snape (2008) identified six major competency areas as: opportunity, organizing, strategic, relationship, commitment and conceptual competencies. In this study, entrepreneurial competencies are categorized in line with Noe, Hollenbeck and Gerhart (2015) as soft skills and hard skills.

Soft skills are core skills which are desirable in all professions (Tewari & Sharma, 2010). They are self-developed skills that are not specific to one job or career (Hendarman & Tjakraatmadja, 2012). They are combination of personal traits, attitudes, social skills, communication skills, social and emotional intelligence that enable individuals to work well and achieve their goals with complementing hard skills. They include critical, decision-making, interpersonal, negotiation, problem solving, self-confidence, self-management, teamwork, worth ethics and effective communication skills (Williams, 2015; Radermacher, Walia & Knudson, 2014). They are generic skills. Soft skills play important roles in job performance. They are highly prioritized and required in every job (Ngang, Hashim & Yunus, 2014). In order to

effectively apply the soft skills, hard skills are usually involved (Chan, Goh & Priest, 2015).

Hard skills are skills which are specific to individual professions. They are useful in a specific area of activity. They are easily shaped (Bashir & Farooq, 2019). They are learnable (Wibowo et.al. 2020; Cernuşca, 2020). They might get defunct over a period of time due to changes in the business environment (as a result of technology). Hard skills are mostly learned through education, training and on-the-job experience (Obidile & Ogbara, 2021). Undoubtedly, soft and hard skills should be used as basis for the development of educational curriculum that the industries desire most (Kennedy, 2016). These skills are expected to be nurtured and developed through several courses done in different fields of study at the tertiary institutions such as Business Education programme.

Business education is a specialized programme of instruction designed to provide individual with knowledge, skills and attitude for occupational work and advancement (Obidile & Onyeagba, 2019). It is a field of study which prepares its recipients with relevant competencies needed to be productive in the society. Business education programme strives to achieve these aims by preparing their students for the world of work either as employees or employers of labour (Wey & Wolugbom, 2018). It provides training, experiences, knowledge and skills which could enable their students achieve self-reliance after graduation. It is therefore expected that business education students upon graduation should be able to venture into entrepreneurial activities and thrive successfully, instead of being unemployed or waiting for white collar jobs that are not readily available. In spite of these aims and expectations, lack of job competencies by universities graduates and high rate of graduate unemployment in the society as ascertained by some scholars like Oluyomi and Adedeji (2012); Obidile, Amobi and Uzoekwe (2017) create doubts as to the adequacy of the tertiary education programmes to impart the relevant competencies necessary to meet the demands of the entrepreneurial development.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Considering that the success or failure of graduates (including graduates business education) to exploit opportunities and become self-reliant depend to a large extent on their possession of adequate entrepreneurial competencies required in the contemporary business and labour world. It is therefore expected that the business education graduates who have been imparted

with the necessary competencies that are crucial to the successful establishment and development of entrepreneurial activities should navigate easily through the world of work as employers, and contribute meaningfully to the economic development of their country. As it is expected that access to education should be a precondition for access to opportunities but, this does not seem to be the case as some of them remain unemployed. Studies by some scholars revealed that Nigerian graduates (including business education graduates) lack entrepreneurial competencies required to start up new businesses and create jobs to employ others (Okolie, Nwosu & Mlanga, 2019). This becomes worrisome as there could be a gap between the skills required for successful entrepreneurial development and skills possessed by these graduates. Hence, the need to ascertain the entrepreneurial competencies required by business education graduates for successful entrepreneurial development.

### 1.2 Significance of the study

This study will be of importance to the curriculum planners, as it will guide them on what to include in the curriculum so as to improve the employability level of the graduates. It will also help the business education teachers, students and graduates to get notification about the expected entrepreneurial competencies required for entrepreneurial development in the contemporary business world.

### 1.3 Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the soft skills required by business education graduates for successful entrepreneurial development?
2. What are the hard skills required by business education graduates for successful entrepreneurial development?

### 1.4. Null Hypotheses

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

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female entrepreneurs on soft skills required by business education graduates for successful entrepreneurial development.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female entrepreneurs on hard skills required by business education graduates for successful entrepreneurial development.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The theory related to the study is job-matching theory developed by Boyan Jovanovic in 1978. The theory emphasizes the mechanism underlying the process of workers transition to jobs, as well as obstacles to efficient matching of workers with jobs. The theory holds that the foremost goal of education and training is to prepare students (would-be-graduates) for the tasks they would perform on their jobs (Barnard, Veldhuis & Van Rooij, 2001). The theory asserts that a mismatch between the skills required and those possessed by the graduates has a significant contribution to their productivity.

The theory is related to the present study in the sense that, the competencies imparted to business education students in preparation for entrepreneurial activities after graduation, should be compatible with the competencies demanded for entrepreneurial development in the contemporary business and labour world. This is important as their level of transition into the contemporary business and labour world could reveal the compatibility of their entrepreneurial competencies possessed and those required for entrepreneurial development. This entails that graduates could establish and run successful businesses when they possess the required competencies demanded of those businesses. Obviously, without a good fit between the knowledge, skills and abilities of the person and the demands of the job, there could be human resource problems (Mathis & Jackson, 2003). The challenge therefore is to enable the business educators realize the entrepreneurial competencies required for entrepreneurial development so as to align their students' skills to the identified competencies, to improve their employment opportunities. It therefore requires that information about the entrepreneurial competencies required in the contemporary business and labour world should be made available so as to close the gap. Hence, the study.

## 3. Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of all business education graduates who were entrepreneurs in the South East geo-political zone of Nigeria which comprised five States (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo). Purposive sampling was used to select 187 entrepreneurs (business education graduates) who were managers of their businesses and had existed for five years and above. This decision was made in order to use entrepreneurs who were experienced and familiar with the work environment. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire

developed by the researcher after extensive review of the literature. The questionnaire titled ‘Soft and Hard Skills Required for Entrepreneurial Development’ (SHSRED), was validated by three experts, two experienced entrepreneurs (business education graduates) and one expert from Measurement and evaluation Unit, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Their comments and suggestions were incorporated in the final draft of the questionnaire which was used for data collection. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. Part A elicited information on personal data of the respondents, while Part B consisted of two sub-sections of B1 and B2 which contained 40 questions that answered the research questions. The instrument used the measuring scale of a five-point Likert type of: Strongly Agree (SA=5 points), Agree (A=4 points), Undecided (UD=3 points), Disagree (D=2 points) and Strongly Disagree (SD=1 point).

To test the reliability of the instrument, Cronbach alpha’s method was used. In order to ascertain this, 10 copies of the instrument were distributed to 10 experienced entrepreneurs (business education graduates) in Delta State who were not part of the population. Their responses were analyzed and a coefficient value of 0.84 was obtained which was high (Andale, 2017) and considered adequate for the study.

Distribution of the instrument was done through the respondents’ WhatsApp groups. The survey-questionnaire was shared with the help of five research assistants (one research assistant from each State). Following the instructions given, only those questionnaire which were properly filled, duly submitted and whose respondents met the requirements, were used for data analysis. Out of 187 respondents that filled and submitted the questionnaire, 148 (96 males and 52 females) respondents that met the requirements were used for data analysis.

Arithmetic mean was used to analyze the data related to research questions and Standard deviation was used to ascertain the homogeneity or otherwise of the respondents’ mean ratings. The z-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Any item with a mean score of above 3.00 was considered as entrepreneurial competency required and any item with a mean score of below 3.00 was not considered as entrepreneurial competency required. Furthermore, any item with a mean score of 3.00 was considered as undecided in the study. The null hypothesis of no significant difference was not rejected when the z-cal was less than the z-crit, but, when otherwise, it was rejected.

#### 4. Findings

##### 4.1 Research Question 1

What are the soft skills required for successful entrepreneurial development?

**Table 1: Respondents’ mean ratings and standard deviation on soft skills required for entrepreneurial development**

S/N	Soft skills	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Analytical thinking	61	57	12	12	6	4.05	1.09	Agree
2.	Critical thinking	68	46	17	10	7	4.07	1.13	Agree
3.	Decision making skill	62	55	14	12	5	4.06	1.07	Agree
4.	Adaptability	59	55	12	13	9	3.96	1.18	Agree
5.	Reasoning skill	65	55	12	11	5	4.11	1.06	Agree
6.	Problem solving skill	71	51	11	8	7	4.16	1.18	Agree
7.	Active listening skill	58	67	13	8	2	4.16	0.80	Agree
8.	Work ethics	65	60	10	6	7	4.15	1.04	Agree
9.	Creativity	69	46	15	12	6	4.08	1.12	Agree
10.	Team work capability	55	68	12	8	5	4.08	0.99	Agree
11.	Communication skill	64	58	16	6	4	4.16	0.96	Agree
12.	Leadership skill	68	54	11	8	6	4.16	1.05	Agree
13.	Interpersonal skill	48	71	13	12	4	3.99	0.99	Agree
14.	Negotiation skill	67	52	11	14	4	4.11	1.07	Agree
15.	Time management	63	60	12	10	3	4.15	0.97	Agree
16.	Conflict management	64	58	14	7	5	4.14	1.00	Agree
17.	Integrity	66	48	15	11	8	4.03	1.16	Agree

18.	Resilience	63	53	12	13	7	4.03	1.14	Agree
19.	Organization	67	54	11	10	6	4.12	1.07	Agree
20.	Global awareness	69	50	13	9	7	4.11	1.10	Agree

**Note: Mean  $\geq 3.00$  is Agree; N = 148.**

Data in Table 1 show that the twenty items presented have mean and standard deviation values ranging from 3.96 – 4.16 and 0.80 – 1.18 respectively. This indicates that the respondents agreed that the twenty items listed are soft skills required by business education graduates

for successful entrepreneurial development. The closeness of the SD shows homogeneity in respondents' mean ratings on soft skills required by business education graduates for successful entrepreneurial development.

#### 4.2 Research Question 2

What are the hard skills required for successful entrepreneurial development?

**Table 2: Respondents' mean ratings and standard deviation on hard skills required for entrepreneurial development**

S/N	Hard skills	SA	A	UD	D	SD	Mean	SD	Remark
1.	Machine operation	49	68	12	12	7	3.95	1.08	Agree
2.	Software application	59	65	13	6	5	4.13	0.97	Agree
3.	Typing techniques	61	57	11	11	8	4.03	1.13	Agree
4.	Statistical analysis	54	69	10	9	6	4.05	1.02	Agree
5.	Data management	51	64	14	13	6	3.95	1.08	Agree
6.	Data mining	53	66	12	12	5	4.01	1.04	Agree
7.	Business analysis	64	53	16	9	6	4.08	1.07	Agree
8.	Project management and implementation	67	52	12	11	6	4.10	1.09	Agree
9.	Product marketing	60	55	13	12	8	3.99	1.15	Agree
10.	Creative writing	55	62	11	11	9	3.97	1.14	Agree
11.	Web development	56	66	12	10	4	4.08	0.99	Agree
12.	Cyber security	57	62	16	7	6	4.06	1.03	Agree
13.	Video editing	55	62	13	11	7	3.99	1.09	Agree
14.	Coding application	54	66	11	11	6	4.02	1.05	Agree
15.	Cloud computing	58	65	13	9	3	4.12	0.95	Agree
16.	Computer programming	67	55	14	8	4	4.17	0.99	Agree
17.	Block chain	52	68	12	11	5	4.02	1.02	Agree
18.	Book keeping	65	60	13	6	4	4.19	0.95	Agree
19.	Cash flow management	64	60	11	10	3	4.16	0.98	Agree
20.	Human resource management	62	59	15	8	4	4.06	1.25	Agree

**Note: Mean  $\geq 3.00$  is Agree; N = 148.**

Data in Table 2 indicate that the twenty items presented have mean and standard deviation values ranging from 3.95–4.19 and 0.95 –1.25 respectively. This entails that the respondents agreed that the twenty items listed are hard skills required by business education graduates for successful entrepreneurial

development. Also, the SD shows homogeneity in respondents' mean ratings on hard skills required by business education graduates for successful entrepreneurial development.

#### Testing of Null Hypotheses

##### 4.3 Null hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female entrepreneurs on soft skills required by business education graduates for

successful entrepreneurial development. Data for testing the first null hypothesis are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: The z-test analysis of respondents' consideration on soft skills required for successful entrepreneurial development**

Groups	N	X	SD	df	a	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Males	96	3.84	0.38	146	0.05	0.67	1.96	NS
Females	52	3.12	0.33					

The z-test analysis presented in Table 3 reveals that the calculated z value of 0.67 is less than the critical z value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female business education graduate entrepreneurs, on soft skills required by business education graduates, for successful entrepreneurial development. Hence the null hypothesis was not rejected.

#### 4.4 Null hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female entrepreneurs on hard skills required by business education graduates for successful entrepreneurial development. Data for testing the second null hypothesis are presented in Table 4.

**Table 4: The z-test analysis of respondents' consideration on hard skills required for successful entrepreneurial development**

Groups	N	X	SD	df	a	z-cal	z-crit	Decision
Males	96	3.86	0.39	146	0.05	-0.48	1.96	NS
Females	52	3.14	0.34					

Results from Table 4 of the z-test analysis show that the calculated z value of -0.48 is less than the critical z value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female business education graduate entrepreneurs, on hard skills required by business education graduates, for successful entrepreneurial development. Hence the null hypothesis was not rejected.

#### 5. Discussion of Findings

Findings of the study regarding the first research question revealed that, the respondents agreed that the twenty identified soft skills were required by business education graduates for entrepreneurial development. The identified soft skills include: Analytical thinking, Critical thinking, Decision making skill, Adaptability, Reasoning skill, Problem solving skill, Active listening skill, Work ethics, Creativity, Team work capability, Communication skill, Leadership skill, Interpersonal skill, Negotiation skill, Time management, Conflict management, Integrity,

Resilience, Organization and Global awareness. This finding is in line with the view of Akujo and Akele (2017) which stated that creativity was important for entrepreneurship to thrive. In the same vein, the finding is in support with Koehn (2005) who stated that integrity was intrinsically valuable and needed for business success. Furthermore, the finding is in consonance with the study of Thompson, Stuart and Lindsay (1997) which identified flexibility/adaptability to change, dedication, communication skills, initiative, among others, as a set of competencies required by successful entrepreneurs.

Also the test of null hypothesis 1 revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female business education graduate entrepreneurs, on soft skills required by business education graduates, for successful entrepreneurial development. This entails that male and female business education graduate entrepreneurs agreed that the listed soft skills were required for successful entrepreneurial development. This might be due to the fact that the

respondents were in the same or similar businesses and were having similar experiences.

Findings of the study regarding the second research question revealed that, the respondents agreed that the twenty identified hard skills were required by business education graduates for successful entrepreneurial development. The identified hard skills include: Machine operation, Software application, Typing techniques, Statistical analysis, Data management, Data mining, Business analysis, Project management and implementation, Product marketing, Creative writing, Web development, Cyber security, Video editing, Coding application, Cloud computing, Computer programming, Block chain, Book keeping, Cash flow management and Human resource management. This finding is in line with the findings of Patacsil and Tablatin (2017) which revealed that data management, computer operation and networking, among others, were hard skills perceived to be important by industries.

Furthermore, the test of null hypothesis 2 revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female business education graduate entrepreneurs, on hard skills required by business education graduates, for successful entrepreneurial development. This indicates that male and female business education graduate entrepreneurs agreed that the listed hard skills were required for successful entrepreneurial development. The probable reason for the similarity in the finding could be as a result of the fact that the respondents were being exposed to same or similar business conditions so their responses tend to be similar.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that business education graduates require entrepreneurial competencies (soft and hard skills) for successful entrepreneurial development as possession of these competencies could enable the graduates to achieve high employability status and create jobs. Hence, the following recommendations were made:

1. Business education graduates and students should endeavour to imbibe and put into use the identified entrepreneurial competencies for their entrepreneurial development to avert unemployment.
2. Business education teachers should consistently be trained and retrained to be abreast with the current demands of the contemporary business world, so as to

incorporate them when teaching their students.

3. Philanthropists, parents and government should help to provide the necessary financial assistance in the form of grants or soft loans to the business education programme, to enable their administrators acquire the necessary equipment and facilities needed to impart the required entrepreneurial competencies to students, for smooth transition into the contemporary labour market as employers of labour after graduation.

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