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ABSTRACT

This paper determined Industry-based Skills and Liberalization of Employment Opportunities for Business Education Graduates in Akwa Ibom State. Two research questions were developed to guide this study. Two hypotheses were raised and tested at .05 level of significance. This study was based on Fischer (1980) skill theory. Relevant literatures were reviewed and referenced accordingly. The population of this study was one hundred and twenty (120) managers of registered business in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. Convenient sampling technique was adopted to select sixty-eight (68) managers as respondent. Data for the study were collected using a structured questionnaire captioned: Industry-based Skills and Liberalization of Employment Opportunities for Business Education Graduates (IBSLEOBEGQ). Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while t-test analysis was used for testing the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. The findings revealed that technical and soft skills are significant industry-based skills that influences liberalization of employment opportunities for business education graduates. It was recommended that: Business Education curriculum should be updated to global standard; this will afford the graduates wider opportunities in the labour market. Also, student should be given more training of technical and soft skills to enhance skill acquisition that would position graduates on a global perspective.

KEYWORDS: Industry-based Skills, Liberalization, Employment Opportunities.

INTRODUCTION Skills are the specific abilities and proficiencies required to perform tasks for a particular job or role. Skills can be considered as soft and hard skills needed. Skills enhance liberalization of employment opportunities. Schulz (2020) skills can be considered as a subset of hard skills, which encompass a broader range of abilities that are job-related and measurable. For example, the ability to write effective generative AI (genAI) prompts might be a required hard skill; a technical skill might be expertise in using specific genAI tools like ChatGPT. Employers in industries like information technology and manufacturing need technical abilities, as they have specific technical skill requirements that are essential to the business operations, which leads to better job accomplishment, promotions, growth,, and opportunities for diverse career choices.. Skills promote flexibility, efficiency, and competitiveness in employment practice. Liberalization of employment

ensures a broader scope of gaining employment. Skills are the specific abilities and proficiencies required to perform tasks for a particular job or role. Skills can be considered as soft and hard skills needed. Skills enhance liberalization of employment opportunities. Schulz (2020) skills can be considered as a subset of hard skills, which encompass a broader range of abilities that are job-related and measurable. For example, the ability to write effective generative AI (genAI) prompts might be a required hard skill; a technical skill might be expertise in using specific genAI tools like ChatGPT. Employers in industries like information technology and manufacturing need technical abilities, as they have specific technical skill requirements that are essential to the business operations, which leads to better job accomplishment, promotions, growth, and opportunities for diverse career choices. Skills promote flexibility, efficiency, and competitiveness in employment practice. Liberalization of employment ensures a broader scope of gaining employment. Skills are the specific abilities and proficiencies required to perform tasks for a particular job or role. Skills can be considered as soft and hard skills needed. Skills enhance liberalization of employment opportunities. According to Schulz (2020), skills can be considered a subset of hard skills, which encompass a broader range of job-related and measurable abilities. For example, the ability to write effective generative AI (genAI) prompts might be a required hard skill; a technical skill might be expertise in using specific genAI tools like ChatGPT. Employers in industries like information technology and manufacturing need technical abilities, as they have specific technical skill requirements that are essential to the business operations,, which leads to better job accomplishment, promotions, growth,, and opportunities for diverse career choices.. Skills promote flexibility, efficiency,, and competitivenesssss in employment practice. Liberalization of employment ensures a broader scope of gaining employment. Skills are the specific abilities and proficiencies required to perform tasks for a particular job or role. Skills can be considered as soft and hard skills needed.d. Skills enhance liberalization of employment opportunities. Schulz (2020) skills can be considered as a subset of hard skills, which encompass a broader range of abilities that are job-related and measurable. For example, the ability to write effective generative AI (genAI) prompts might be a required hard skill; a technical skill might be expertise in using specific genAI tools like ChatGPT. Employers in industries like information technology and manufacturing need technical abilities, as they have specific technical skill requirements that are essential to the business operations, which leads to better job accomplishment, promotions, growth, and opportunities for diverse career choices. Skills promote flexibility, efficiency, and competitiveness in employment practice. Liberalization of employment ensures a broader scope of gaining employment.Soft skills are personal attributes and interpersonal abilities that influence how individuals interact with others and navigate various situations, particularly in the workplace. It encompass a broad range of characteristics, including communication, teamwork, adaptability, and emotional intelligence, this are considered crucial for success in both professional and personal life. Soft skills are often developed through experience and are transferable across different roles in the industries (Benson 2020). Liberalization of employment opportunities encompass policies and reforms that influence who to work in a particular workplace, how they work and under what condition.

SKILL THEORY BY FISCHER (1980)

Fischer (1980) theory was directed to the mind, brain, and education programme to achieve skills development. The theory is a comprehensive theory of human development that not only describes mechanisms of development and a developmental sequence, but also considers the impact of contextual and interpersonal factors on learning. The theory is focused on skill, which is the capacity to act in a certain way in a certain context. The theorist noted that skills incorporate emotions, motivation, meaning, and action. That skills are develop through levels of increasing complexity, differentiation, and integration, within a dynamic system that includes self, others and environment. The skill theory has impact on learning and development which involves the whole brain, cognition develops through levels and tiers, context matters and learning which is slow and variable but support is essential. The author concluded that in all domains of human performance, technical, physical, cognitive, and mental skills

on one hand and innate ability and effort/practice on the other, are required for the best performance. This examination reveals that skills and performance are inextricably intertwined. While skill affects performance, performance in turn defines and affects skill.

TECHNICAL SKILLS AND LIBERATION OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Technical skills vary widely between industry and job type. For computer programmers, knowledge of various coding languages is considered a technical skill. Customer service representatives may need technical skills relating to customer management and telephone ddddddperformance, and open up more career opportunities. Technical skills are accompanied with soft skills like communication; problem solving, decision making and teamwork are valuable. The employees' ability to safely and precisely operate equipment is what ensures the job gets done correctly

The technical skills required for a job will vary depending on the role and nature of the industry. Certain skills are essential for performing a particular task or role. Technical skills, also known as hard skills, this are qualities acquired by using and gaining expertise in performing physical or digital tasks. Benson (2020) these skills have been essential to the growth of an organisation and are now essential skills across many industries. Regardless of the individual career path, having relevant technical skills can set up jobs for applicants and improve chances of getting employment in a global and competitive labour market. Some specific technical skills include: programming languages, common operating systems, machine operation, software proficiency, technical writing and data analysis.

Richard (2020) opined that employers seek for technical skills at the point of recruitment and most tasks require employees to use specific tools, systems or processes to carry out assigned responsibilities effectively. These capabilities are known as technical skills, and they are essential across a wide range of industries. Whether the individual is with software, machinery or specialized equipment, having the right technical knowledge helps ensure tasks are completed accurately and efficiently. Vasanthakumari (2020) noted that technical skills are important because they enable employees to effectively use the tools, programme and processes which make employee more competitive and capable in a wide range of jobs.

Bailey, *et al.* (2020) opined that technical skills are the abilities and knowledge that enable someone to perform certain functions with no supervision. This skill can be attained through training (informal or formal) or education. Technical skills are essential for increased productivity and competitive advantage. A young graduate can be positioned for success by staying informed about the most sought-after technical abilities by employers, and investing in continuous learning, and effectively showcasing expertise on a given task.

According to Lane (2021) technical skills are the specific hard skills required to perform certain tasks. If an individual have the technical skills to do the job expected of, the person stands to increase the chances of getting that job. The relevant technical skills make the individual a valuable candidate to potential employers in the industry setting:

- **Data analysis:** Proficiency in data manipulation, statistical analysis, and proficiency with various data analysis software tools and programmes
- **Data visualization:** The ability to represent information in graphical formats that make it easy for users to understand the information quickly and accurately
- **Programming and web development:** Knowledge of HTML, CSS, JavaScript, and other frameworks are required
- **Cloud computing:** Familiarity with platforms like Amazon Web Services (AWD), Microsoft Azure, or Google Cloud
- **Cyber security:** Understanding network security, encryption, and vulnerability assessment

- AI and machine learning: Competence in algorithms, machine learning frameworks, and data modelling

Soft Skills and Liberalization of Employment Opportunities

Many employers look for a balance between hard skills and soft skills when making employment decisions. Employers value skilled workers with a proven track record of completing tasks on time. Employers also value workers with strong communication skills and a good understanding of organisation products and services. When communicating with prospective clients, workers with soft skills can put together compelling presentations even if their specific job is not in sales or marketing. Another valued soft skill is the ability to coach co-workers on new tasks. Workers are often most effective when they have strong soft skills.

Soft skills are personal attributes, such as creativity and communication that characterized a person's ability to work effectively with others. Soft skills are character traits and interpersonal skills that allow a person to interact effectively with others at workplace to accomplish an assigned task. Colman (2022) opined that soft skills benefit businesses when it is practiced on a company-wide basis. For example, a collaborative spirit among workers is essential. Team members who are able to work well with people of different generations and backgrounds are generally more productive and better able to focus on common priorities. Efficiency and output will improve when workers collaborate by sharing knowledge and tools to get jobs done and on time. The ability to learn new methods and technologies is also a desired soft skill for all workers. Benson (2020) soft skill recognizes various learning styles and encourages workers to pursue the methods that work best for them. Employers seek for skilled workers because workers with good soft skills can enhance organisations achieve higher levels of efficiency and productivity.

Bailey *et al.* (2020) soft skills are character traits and interpersonal skills that allow a person to interact effectively with others. In the workplace, soft skills are considered a complement to hard skills, which refer to a person's knowledge and occupational skills. The author noted that psychologists may use the term "soft skills" to describe someone's emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) as opposed to intelligence quotient (IQ). Johnson (2020) noted that in a competitive labour market, individuals who demonstrate a good combination of hard and soft skills often enjoy a higher demand for their services.

Alison (2022) emotional intelligence is a specific soft skill. It involves the ability to recognize, accept, understand, and manage emotions. The author noted that a major part of emotional intelligence is self-awareness. This means being aware of ones emotions, strengths, weaknesses and understanding of how it affects others and avoiding hasty decisions or misunderstandings. Alison (2022) further observed that employers seek for workers who have self-awareness, ability to adjust and also being effective at receiving feedback and making personal improvements as they can objectively assess their behaviour and attitudes not to affect the organisation.

Omoniyi (2020) opined that employers seek for soft skills that enable individuals to work effectively with others; such skills include how to manage relationships and people, navigate the complexities of the modern workplace and to achieve organisational goals. Soft skills are non-technical skills, including teamwork, problem-solving, and critical thinking, that enhances good relationships with others. Johnson (2020) soft skills include communication, teamwork, leadership, problem-solving, adaptability, and time management.

Harsh (2022) noted that soft skills relate to how you work. It is also known as power skills, common skills, essential skills, or core skills, and is psycho-social skills generally applicable to all professions. The author defined soft skills as the personal attributes and interpersonal skills that shape how to work with others. Skills like communication and teamwork is crucial. Employers often look out for

soft skills when recruiting like; personal characteristics, social skills and communication skills which enable the individual to interact effectively, work as a team and harmoniously with others.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To determine the influence of technical skills and liberalization of employment opportunities for business education graduates in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.
2. To determine the influence of soft skills and liberalization of employment opportunities for business education graduates in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study:

1. To what extent do technical skills influence liberalization of employment opportunities for business education graduates in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State?.
2. To what extent do soft skills influence liberalization of employment opportunities for business education graduates in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State?.

Hypotheses:

H0₁ There is no significant influence of technical skills for liberalization of employment opportunities for business education graduates in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

H0₂ There is no significant influence of soft skills for liberalization of employment opportunities for business education graduates in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

METHOD

This study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population comprised one hundred and twenty (120) managers of registered business organisations in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. A sample size of 68 managers was selected for the study using convenient sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was a validated questionnaire titled ‘ Industry-based Skills and Liberalization of Employment Opportunities for Business Education Graduates (IBSLEOBEGQ)’ , the questionnaire contained a 10 item on a modified four point rating scale of Very High influence = 4 points, High influence = 3 points, Moderate influence = 2 points and Low influence = 1 point. A trial test was conducted using Cronbach alpha statistic which yielded a reliability coefficients of .79. The researchers administered the instrument to the respondents and followed up for retrieval of the entire questionnaire. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while t-test analysis was used to test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was accepted where the p-value is equal to or greater than the alpha level of .05. The analysis was carried out using SPSS version 23.0.

RESULTS

Research Question 1

To what extent does technical skills influence liberalization of employment opportunities for business education graduates in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State?.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation scores on technical skills and liberalization of employment opportunities N = 68

S/N	Technical skills and employability opportunities	Mean	SD	Rmk
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1	Are abilities and knowledge that enhances performance of task with less supervision	3.22	0.41	HI
2	Involves strategic thinking and cross department collaboration.	3.32	0.43	HI
3	Involves expertise and knowledge needed to accomplish complex processes Expertise need in performing physical or digital tasks.	3.24	0.49	HI
4	Ability to operate machines	3.41	0.47	HI
5		3.37	0.40	HI
	Cluster Mean	3.47		HI

Table 1 revealed that the mean value of all the items were relevant for technical skills and liberalization of employment opportunities. The cluster mean was 3.37 while the standard deviation ranged between 0.40 – 0.49, this means that there was a great influence of technical skill on liberalization of employment opportunities in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The item on the Table also indicated that the respondents were not divergent in their opinion.

Research Question 2

To what extent does soft skills influence liberalization of employment opportunities for business education graduates in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State?.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation scores on soft skills and liberalization of employment opportunities N = 68

S/N	Soft skills and employability opportunities	Mean	SD	Rmk
1	Personal attributes, creativity and communication contribute to work effectiveness.	3.21	0.39	HI
2	Involves problem-solving, adaptability, and time management	3.43	0.41	HI
3	Requires to navigate the complexities of the workplace	3.38	0.44	HI
4	Involves character traits and interpersonal skills that allow the individual to interact an work as a team	3.45	0.40	HI
	Help organisations achieve higher levels of efficiency and productivity.			HI
5	Cluster Mean	3.37	0.42	HI

Table 2 revealed that the mean value of all the items were relevant for soft skills and liberalization of employment opportunities. The cluster mean was 3.49 while the standard deviation ranged between 0.39 – 0.44, this means that there was a great influence of soft skill on liberalization of employment opportunities in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The item on the Table also indicated that the respondents were not divergent in their opinion.

Hypotheses

H0₁ There is no significant influence of technical skills for liberalization of employment opportunity for business education graduates in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

Table 3: Summary of t-test analysis on technical skills for liberalization of employment opportunity for business education graduates N = 68

Respondents	N	Mean	t-cal	P≤.05	Decision
Technical Skill		3.49			
	68		.19	.003**	S
Job opportunities		3.11			

The result in Table 3 shows the calculated t-value of .19 with a corresponding p-value of .003. Since the p-value is less than .05 level of significance (P≤.05), the null hypothesis that was stated was not significant and was rejected and the alternate accepted. This means that technical skill has a high influence on liberalization of employment opportunities for business education graduates Akwa Ibom State.

H0₂ There is no significant influence of soft skills for liberalization of employment opportunity for business education graduates in Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

Table 4: Summary of t-test analysis on soft skills for liberalization of employment opportunity for business education graduates N = 68

Respondents	N	Mean	t-cal	P≤.05	Decision
Soft Skill		3.49			
	68		.12	.001**	S
Job opportunities		3.11			

The result in Table 4 shows the calculated t-value of .12 with a corresponding p-value of .001. Since the p-value is less than .05 level of significance (P≤.05), the null hypothesis that was stated was not significant and was rejected and the alternate accepted. This means that soft skill has a high influence on liberalization of employment opportunities for business education graduates Akwa Ibom State.

DISCUSSION

Findings of this study showed that employers of labour seek for technical skills to enhance high level of productivity. Therefore, business education graduate should go for practical skills enhancement

for diversification of job. Appropriate skills development brings about improvement, diversification, qualification and readiness for employment. This finding agrees with Richard (2020) who opined that employers seek for technical skills at the point of recruitment and most task require employees to use specific tools, systems or processes to carry out assigned responsibilities effectively. These capabilities are known as technical skills, and are essential across a wide range of industries skills need. Whether the individual is with software, machinery or specialized equipment, having the right technical knowledge helps ensure tasks are completed accurately and efficiently.

The findings of this study also indicated that employers of labour seek for soft skills to achieve organisational goals. Therefore, business education graduates should go for soft skills acquisition which include; creativity, team work, effective communication and tendency to control emotions and work effectively in a workplace. This finding collaborates with Colman (2022) who opined that soft skills benefit businesses when they are practiced on a company-wide basis. The author noted that collaborative spirit among workers is essential. Team members who are able to work well with people of different generations and backgrounds are generally more productive and better able to focus on common priorities. Efficiency and output improve when workers collaborate by sharing knowledge and tools to get jobs done. The ability to learn new methods and technologies is also a desired soft skill for industry workers. Soft skill recognize various learning styles and encourage workers to pursue the methods that work best to achieve high level of productivity.

Also this finding is in line with Bailey *et al.* (2020) who observed that soft skills are character traits and interpersonal skills that allow a person to interact effectively with others. Soft skills are considered a complement to hard skills, which refer to a person's knowledge and occupational skills. The author noted that some psychologists use the term "soft skills" to describe someone's emotional intelligence quotient (EQ) as opposed to intelligence quotient (IQ). In a competitive labour market, individuals who demonstrate a good combination of hard and soft skills stand the chances of being employed globally.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that technical skills are highly required by organisations to effectively and efficient move the business to a global perspective. Skills enable the individual to stand out and create opportunity for employment. Therefore, business education graduates need equip themselves with technical skills that reduce supervision of work and ability to operate different machines to enhance organisational goals and business growth. Soft skills are high requirements of organisations that have set standards for its operations. Soft skills enhance job performance. Therefore, business education graduates should equip themselves with soft skills that would enhance liberalisation of employment opportunities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Business Education curriculum should be updated to global standard; this will afford the graduates a wider opportunities in the labour market.
2. Student should be given more training of technical and soft skills to enhance skill acquisition that would position graduates on a global perspective.

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