ASSESSMENT OF NON-TECHNICAL SKILLS REQUIRED BY TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION GRADUATES FOR EMPLOYMENT IN BAYELSA STATE.

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Abstract

The study centered on assessment of non-technical skills required by technology education graduates for employment in Bayelsa State. The study made use of descriptive survey research design. Three research questions were formulated to guide the study. The population for the study comprised 31 respondents consisting of directors, managers, principal of various organisations. A twenty-one (21) items questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. The instrument was validated by an expert from the Department of vocational and technology education, Rivers State University and a Director from Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education Bayelsa State. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha and the reliability index stood at 0.98, 0.95 and 0.96. The data collected were analysed using mean statistic and standard deviation. The study revealed that employers placed great importance on non-technical skill such as communication skill, problem solving skill and team work skills. Base on the findings, the study recommends that Non-technical skill should be integrated into the curriculum of technology education programmes. Lecturer of technology education should be exposed to training and workshop on the relevance arrears of non-technical skills. Graduates of technology education should also help by attending seminars and workshops that will expose them to non-technical skills.

Key Words: Non-Technical Skills, Employment, Technology Education Graduates.

INTRODUCTION

Higher institutions have been concerned with producing graduates with developmental knowledge, attributes, and skills which any educated person is expected to have. They also spore individuals to develop their abilities to highest potentials in their life span so, they can contribute effectively to societal growth and development, achieve personal fulfilment and be well fortified for job (Maripaz&Ombra, 2016). Higher Institutions should make parallel adjustment that will respond to the labour market, they should be committed to develop graduates that are experts in their field and be able to transfer their expertise to any work environment they found themselves (Abas-Mastura, Imam & Osman, 2013). In essence, graduates of these institutions are expected to have developed not only in their subject specification but also in generalize skills. It was based on this thatVocational and Technology Education courses obtained in the higher institutions in Nigeria are structured in a manner that there is a separation between Vocational and Technology courses and Education courses. These courses are expected to exposed graduates to perform effectively and efficiently in the workplace (Mohammed & Esther, 2020). The students of Vocational and Technology

Education programme are expected to choose options they want to specialize in the course of their four years of study.

The fast changing global business environment due to technological advancement, has resulted to greater demand and challenges so, the twenty-first 21st century technology education graduates should be capable enough to handle situations which require a complex set of technical as well as non-technical skills (Suhail, *et al*., 2018). In the past, focus of Technology education had been to provide excellent technological education with technological knowledge and skills, but lately the importance of non-technical skills cannot be overemphasized as it has been widely acknowledged as part of the vital areas required for employment in industrial organisations (Bakare, *et al,* 2019). Hence graduates of technology education must possess both technical and nontechnical skills in order to catch up with the current demands of industrial organisations (Jackson & Chapman, 2012). According to Dupre& Williams cited by Ehimen and Sele (2021**),** the most effective way for graduates to stand out among the crowd is for them to possess Non-technical skills. Studies have also shown that non-technical skills of graduate are either from an employer's perspective or students' perspective in an organisation (Leslie, 2021).

An organisation is a group of people who have united together to pursue and accomplish a common purpose as one team (Komora, 2017). Industrial organisations are businesses that produce (manufactures) goods as opposed to services (Komora, 2017). These industries being a production organisation require the services of well skilled workers in both technical and non-technical skills in order to efficiently actualize their outlined organisational goals (Omar, *et al,* 2012). To be successful in any industrial organisation, Technology education graduates must distinguish themselves from other candidates with similar qualifications. This differentiation is showcased by the role of non-technical skills possessed by technology education graduate.

The main barriers to higher institution graduates in entering the world of work is the gap between the graduate job skills and the skills needed in the workplace which are non-technical skills. The workforce in the 21st century dose not only requires graduates with high academic qualifications as represented by the subject and degree classes but they should also be equipped with a number of non-technical skills and attributes. Employer surveys indicate that occupation-specific skills are no longer sufficient for graduates to meet the needs of national labour markets (OECD, 2013).

In addition to basic and specific knowledge and skills, workers are nowadays expected to have an additional set of skills because the current working environment differs from the previous age. A number of skills and attributes called non-technical skills are required by students to prepare them to meet the needs of various occupations after graduation. Non-technical skills are considered one missing link between education and training and the world of work. The global job market is characterized by change and increased competition for jobs. Research conducted by Think Global and British Council found that for job seekers, knowledge and awareness of the wider world are more important than degree classification (Think global and

British council, 2011). In Today's global competition the process of new management require the employee to have non-technical skills such as critical thinking, ability to solve problems besides excellent in communication skills. In order to respond to technology advances and the competitive world of work, it is necessary to prepare graduates to have the skills and ability to adapt to working environment (Sauder &Zuzei, 2021).

According to Cassidy and Yorkein Made *et al*., (2017). The importance of non-technical skills is increasingly emphasized in recent times. Non-technical skills are those skills which are generic in nature and are relevant across various jobs or professions (Awang, *et al.*, 2018). They are those skills that do not require technical knowledge or technical background. They are also referred to as essential skills, basic skills, generic skills, soft skills, employability skills, key skills and core skills (Nasir, *et al.*, 2011). According to Leach in Ehimen&Sele (2021). Non-technical skills are cognitive personal and social, skills necessary for safe and effective performance of technical skills, tasks and procedures in an organisation. Non-technical skills are a group of essential abilities that involve the development of a knowledge base, expertise level and mind-set that is increasingly necessary for success in the modern workplace.
Non-technical skills are typically considered essential qualifications for many job positions and hence have become necessary for the success of an individual's employment at any level within a business environment (business dictionary.com, 2017). According to the American Management Association, non-technical skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving, creativity and innovation, collaboration, and communication skills are becoming increasingly important in today's global economy (AMA, 2010). Other research also shows that non-technical skills are essential for success of graduate's career in the workplace. Klibi and Oassu (2013), Abayadeera and Watty (2016).

Conrad and Leigh (2015) classified non- technical skills into four types: problem solving & other cognitive skills; oral communication skills; personal qualities & work ethics; and interpersonal & teamwork skills. Gowsalya and Kumar (2015), listed some of these employability skills which include: team working, problem solving, self-management, knowledge of the business, literacy and numeracy relevant to the post, ICT knowledge, effective interpersonal and communication skills, ability to use own initiative but also to follow instructions and leadership skills where necessary.

In addition, for technical students to understand and apply the effective communication and other employability skill they have to be taught by technical educators (Gowsalya*et al.,* 2015). Wilson *et al*., (2012) highlighted various non-technical skills to be; communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, team work; lifelong learning, information management, entrepreneurial skills, moral and professional ethics and leadership skills. Non-technical Skills required by graduates in entering the workforce includes communication, problem-solving, decision-making, analytical and critical thinking, synthesizing information, teamwork, interpersonal, and continuous learning (LOW *et al,* 2016), which is also a prerequisite for professional recognition.

Hence it becomes important for higher institutions to design and implement programs that are appropriate for the missions and goals of stakeholders or employers in the 21st century workplace. Higher institutions has the responsibility to provide graduates with knowledge in the professional field with intellectual skills and ability to apply theory to practical situations.

In recent years, many countries have started to focus on the employability of their graduates (Al-Azri, 2016; Al Hinai, 2018). However, the concept of employability seems to be a difficult one to define for employers, academics and students. Generally, non-technical skills includes "skills that enable fresh graduates to secure jobs and those who are already used to maintain or advance in their career" (Marzuki& Jerome, 2017). Amongst these skills that are required by the job market is the ability to communicate in English (Al-Azri, 2016; Thomas, Piquette, & McMaster, 2016; Mourshed, Farrell, &Barton, 2013). . In the same vein, Abdulla, Naser and Saeid (2014) stated that employers in Kuwait need graduates to be competent in expressing themselves verbally, having good presentation skills, listening and participating successfully in a meeting and responding to a conversation.

Shonubi and Akintaro (2016) stress that nothing can be achieve in any organization without communication. Communication represents the blood stream in human body without it human body cannot function effectively. Communication is the process that occurs between two or more people in which a message is delivered and received by the other party. Communication happens every day in the workplace, such as managers give direction to workers, co-workers communicate to plan a project and employees communicate information to customers. The ability to communicate is one of the non-technical skills necessary for the success of a graduate's in entering the workforce. A job candidate with good communication skills could be selected over the other candidate (Crawford *et al,* 2011). Communication skills that contribute to harmonious and productive relations between employees and customers are critical to career success and also contribute significantly to organizational success (Du-Babcock in Made *et al,* 2017). Communication skills relate to one's ability in the context of speaking, listening, writing and reading. Communication is effective only when the message sent by sender is received by the receiver in the way it was expected by the sender. In order to be able to communicate effectively, a graduate or job seeker must have mastery in all domains of communication skills : (a) listen effectively, (b) communicate accurately and concisely, (c) effective oral communication, (d) communicate pleasantly and professionally, (e) effective written communication, (f) ask good question, and (g) communicate appropriately and professionally using social media (Crawford *et al,* 2011).

Another skill is problem solving skills which are highly sought after by employers as many companies rely on their employees to identify and solve problems. It is among the most important skill students must have when they start life after graduation. In this 21st century, one of the objectives of education is raising individuals, who can apply the information they learn to solve problems, develop strategies, and transfer their knowledge. Problem solving abilities are important skills for graduates because a healthy society or a healthy nation can only maintain its existence through adopting themselves into new conditions by problem solving abilities (Incebacat&Ersoy, 2016).

Abazou (2016) in the same vein noted that problem solving skills involve identification of the problem, defining the main element of the problem, examining the possible solutions, acting on the resolving problem and looking for lessons to learn. These skills can effectively lead to efficiency in job performance in an organization. Gomez (2017) also explained that problem solving skills involves the ability to identify problems, look at them objectively, decide based on facts, develop practical and creative solutions, and follow a process to solve them without being overwhelmed by them or being dependent on others to solve them. Even the hardest problems can be solved with the right mind-set and working systematically towards a solution. Therefore, problem solving skills involves identification of problems and being able to proffer solutions to the problems. Saygili (2017) noted that the stages of effective problem solving include the following:

i. **Problem Identification:** This stage involves detecting and recognizing that there is a problem, identifying the nature of the problem and defining the Problem.
ii. **Structuring the Problem:** This involves careful observation, inspection, fact finding and developing a clear picture of the problem and to increase understanding.
iii. **Looking for Possible Solutions:** At this stage possible courses of action is being generated by letting each person in the group express their views on possible solution.
iv. **Making a Decision:** This stage involves careful analysis of the different possible courses of action and then selecting the best solution for implementation.
v. Implementation: This involves accepting and carrying out the chosen course of action.
vi. **Monitoring/Seeking Feedback:** This stage involves reviewing the outcomes of problem solving over a period of time and seeking feedback as to the success of the outcomes of the chosen solution.

Team working skill, is composed of individuals who have several different characteristics. Teamwork is a cooperative process that allows ordinary people to achieve extraordinary results (Scarnai cited by Made *et al*, 2017). Teamwork is synonymous to working collaboratively in groups. When individuals working collaboratively in groups, they:(1) have a shared collective identity,

(2) have common goals,
(3) are interdependent in terms of their assigned tasks or outcomes,
(4) have distinctive roles within the team, and
(5) are part of a larger organizational context that influences their work.

And that they, in turn, can influence (Kozlourski&Llgen in Made *et al*, 2017). Teamwork replies upon individuals working together in a cooperative environment to achieve common team goals through sharing knowledge and skills. Successful teamwork relies upon synergism existing between all team members creating an environment where they are all willing to contribute and participate in order to promote and nurture a positive, effective team environment. Team members must be flexible enough to adapt to cooperative working environments where goals are achieved through collaboration and respect with another team member.

Teamwork involves building relationships and working with other people using a number of important skills and habits, such as: working cooperatively; contributing to groups with ideas,

suggestions, and effort; a sense of responsibility; a healthy respect for different opinions; and ability to participate in group decision-making. Teamwork is a key requirement in most occupations and an essential part of workplace success. Employers are seeking to recruit individuals who pay due attention to relations with peers and superiors. Students and employers noted the ability to work with others effectively is an important work-readiness skill (Crawford et al, 2011). Business executives want to recruit employees who will add value to the workplace with a composite of soft skills and who will embrace teamwork (Griffin and Annulis, 2013).

Teamwork skills can contribute to productive working relationships and outcomes. Teamwork skills are a set of skills that individuals use to foster the success of groups or teams from diverse backgrounds. Teamwork skills groups consist of a number of facets: (a) productive as a team member, (b) positive and encouraging attitude, (c) punctual and meets deadline, (d) maintains accountability to the team, (e) work with multiple approaches, (f) aware and sensitive to diversity, and (g) share ideas to multiple audiences (Crawford *et al,* 201).

According to Kathleen (2005), the employers in America are not pleased with many job applicants, particularly those who graduated from technical institutions. This problem occurs mostly because the applicants do not possess enough nontechnical skills (Suhail, et al., 2018). In Malaysia, these resulted in a low performance in the place of work. Rasul and Mansor (2016), also revealed that there is a mismatch between the skills that graduates acquired and the prerequisite demanded by employers that can make them perform effectively at work. Technical skills development alone without non-technical skills cannot provide assurance for employment in modern industrial and business organisations. In order to overcome this deficiencies, it becomes imperative for this study assessment of non-technical skills needed for employment of technology education graduates in Bayelsa state.

Statement of Problem

In spite of governments several efforts through different policies to make the Nigerian educational system more functional, there are still growing concerns as many graduates from technology education are found rooming the streets and become agents of crime. Unfortunately some of them have very good certificate, then what could have caused these problem? Could it be that such Graduates from educational institutions lacks adequate relevant job related skills that would help them become employed. Oviawe, Uwameiye and Uddin, (2017) noted that Employers of labour have continued to express their worry over the quality of the current graduate of technical institutions in Nigeria partly due to their lack of relevant job skills for performance in industries. Hence the study of this paper assessment of non-technical skills needed for employment of technology education graduates in Bayelsa state.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to assessment of non-technical skills needed for employment of technology education graduates in Bayelsa state. The study specifically sort to find out:

1. The extent to which communication skill is required for employment of technology education graduates in Bayelsa state.

2. The extent to which problem solving skill is required for employment of technology education graduates in Bayelsa state.
3. The extent to which team- working skill is required for employment of technology education graduates in Bayelsa state.

Research Questions

1. To what extent is communication skill required for employment of technology education graduates in Bayelsa state.
2. To what extent is problem solving skill required for employment of technology education graduates in Bayelsa state.
3. To what extent is team- working skill required for employment of technology education graduates in Bayelsa state.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a Descriptive survey research design because it was considered suitable for this study. Shona (2021), a descriptive survey design deploys the use of questionnaires, interviews and direct observation to ascertain the opinions, attitudes, perception and preference of individuals under study. The population of the study was 31 respondents. They were purposively sampled because they decide who is to be employed in an organisation.

A well-structured questionnaire titled "questionnaire on assessment of non-technical required by technology education graduates for employment in Bayelsa State (QANSTEGE)" was used to obtain responses from directors, personnel managers and principals of various Organisations. The questionnaire contained 21-items, designed in a 4-point rating scale developed by the researcher. The responses were Strongly Agreed (AS), Agreed (A), Disagreed (D) and Strongly Disagreed (SD) having numerical values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively.

The instrument was subjected to face and content validation by an expert from the Department of vocational and technology education, Rivers State University and a Director from Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education Bayelsa State. The internal consistency of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha reliability method and the reliability index stood at 0.98, 0.95 and 0.96. A total of 31 copies of questionnaires was administered and they were all retrieved by the researcher for analysis.

Data collected from respondents were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. The computation of the mean and standard deviation were carried out with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). It was decided that an item with a calculated mean value equal or greater than 2.50 (2.50 – 4.00) was rated agreed while item with the calculated mean less than 2.50 (0 – 2.49) was rated disagreed as required.

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Research Question 1. To what extent is communication skill required by technology education graduates for employment in Bayelsa State.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Communication Skill required by Technology Education Graduates for Employment in Bayelsa State.

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Graduates of technology education need to have the ability to listen attentively to be employable.	3.48	0.62	Agreed
2	Graduates of technology education need to have the ability to communicate effectively and concisely to be employable.	3.42	0.72	Agreed
3	Graduates of technology education need to have the ability of effective oral communication to be employable	3.35	0.66	Agreed
4	Graduates of technology education need to have the ability to communicate pleasantly and professionally to be employable.	3.39	0.72	Agreed
5	Graduates of technology education need to have the ability to effectively communicate in writing to be employable.	3.32	0.70	Agreed
6	Graduates of technology education need to have the ability to ask good question to be employable.	3.16	0.73	Agreed
7	Graduates of technology education need to have the ability to communicate appropriately to be employable.	3.45	0.62	Agreed
8	Graduates of technology education need to have the ability to professionally and effectively use social media to be employable.	3.16	0.82	Agreed

Source; Researchers Field Work

The result of the data presented in Table 1 above revealed the response of employers with a mean range of 3.16 - 3.48 and standard deviation range of 0.62 - 0.82. The Standard deviation indicates that the opinions of the employers were not far from one another in their responses while the mean response of the employers indicates that all the items on communication skills are required by Technology Education Graduates for employment in Bayelsa State.

Research Question 2. To what extent is problem solving skills required by technology education graduates for employment in Bayelsa State.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Problem Solving Skills required by Technology Education Graduates for Employment in Bayelsa State.

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Graduates of technology education need to have the ability to identify problems and the causes to be employable.	3.42	0.67	Agreed
2	Graduates of technology education need to have the ability of Structuring the problems to be employable.	2.97	0.80	Agreed
3	Graduates of technology education need to have the ability of Looking for possible solutions to be employable.	3.03	0.80	Agreed
4	Graduates of technology education need to have the ability of sound Decision Making to be employable.	3.13	0.85	Agreed
5	Graduates of technology education need to have the ability of effective Implementation of decision to be employable.	3.10	0.75	Agreed
6	Graduates of technology education need to have the ability of Monitoring and seeking for feedback to be employable	3.16	0.69	Agreed

Source: Researchers Field Work

Data in Table 2 above showed the response of employers with a mean range of 2.97-3.42 and standard deviation range of 0.67-0.85. The Standard deviation indicates that the opinions of the employers were not far from one another in their responses while the mean response of the employers indicates that all the items on problem solving skills are required by Technology Education Graduates for employment in Bayelsa State.

Research Question 3: To what extent is team work skill required by technology education graduates for employment in Bayelsa State.

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of Team Work Skills required by Technology Education Graduates for Employment in Bayelsa State.

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Graduates of technology education need to have the ability to be productive as a team member to be employable.	3.61	0.62	Agreed
2	Graduates of technology education need to have a positive and encouraging attitude to be employable.	3.45	0.62	Agreed
3	Graduates of technology education needs to be punctual and meets deadline to be employable.	3.52	0.51	Agreed

4	Graduates of technology education need to have the ability to maintain accountability to the team to be employable.	3.61	0.50	Agreed
5	Graduates of technology education need to have the ability of working with multiple approaches to be employable.	3.19	0.65	Agreed
6	Graduates of technology education need to be aware and sensitive to diversity for employment.	3.48	0.61	Agreed
7	Graduates of technology education need to have the ability of sharing ideas to multiple audiences for employment.	3.48	0.77	Agreed

Source; Researchers Field work

Data in Table 3 above exposed the responses of employers with a mean range of 3.19 - 3.61 and standard deviation range of 0.50-0.77. The Standard deviation indicates that the opinions of the employers were not far from one another in their responses while the mean response of the employers indicates that all the items on team work skills are required by Technology Education Graduates for employment in Bayelsa state.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study as presented in research question 1in table 1 above revealed that communication skills is one of the most important non-technical skills required by technology education graduates for employment in Bayelsa State.

This study is in confirmity with Maripaz*et al.,* (2013) who in their study revealed that employers gives special consideration to non-technical skills over specific job skills. Caleb and Udofia, (2014) in their study also revealed that recruitment conditions of employers in the contexts of TVE fall into three major categories: professional skills, non-technical skills and entrepreneurial skills. Osami (2013), also showed that graduates in technical education with both professional skills and non-technical skills have more advantage to secure suitable employment.

Findings in Research question 2 as in table 2, showed that problem solving skills is one of the non-technical skills required by technology education graduates for employment in Bayelsa State. This finding was supported by Bakare*et al.,* (2019) who in their study indicated that the following non-technical skills: communication, teamwork, learning, creative thinking, decision-making, self-management and problem-solving skills are essential to metalwork technology graduates from technical colleges in Nigeria to be employable. Hence, non-technical skills are required for the recruitment of technology education graduates in organisations in Bayelsa state.

Findings in Research question 3 as in table 3, indicated that team work skills is one of the non-technical skills required by technology education graduates for employment in Bayelsa state. This aligned with a study by Rasul and Mansor (2016) who found that employers are very

particular about needing graduates who are Self-confident with positive image and can work on pressure without supervision. These findings conform to the findings of Caleb and Udofia (2014), who found that the students of Electrical installation in technical colleges of AkwaIbom State needed interpersonal skills which is one of the generic skills for employability.

CONCLUSION

Most employers want employees who will be effective in today's changing economy demand indicates that occupation-specific skills are no longer sufficient for graduates to meet the needs of today's labour markets. They prefer to hire graduates who can manage change and thrive on it, flexible and adaptable workers who are quick to learn. Increasingly, graduates' attributes are more important than the graduates 'degree subjects

The findings of this study had proved that this study therefore concludes that non-technical skills such as communication skill, problem solving and team work skills are required by technology education graduates for employment in Bayelsa State.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. Non-technical skill should be integrated into the curriculum of technology education programmes.
2. Lecturer of technology education should be exposed to training and workshop on the relevance of non-technical skills.
3. Graduates of technology education should also help themselves by attending seminars and workshops that will expose them to non-technical skills.

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