

## **PUBLIC PERCEPTION AND THE ADVANCEMENT OF BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN STATE-OWNED TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN RIVERS STATE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The study focused on public perception and the advancement of business education programmes in State-Owned Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State. The aim of the study was to find the relationship between public perception and the advancement of business education programmes in State-Owned Tertiary Institutions in Rivers State. In conclusion Business education programmes will have no global focus in the era of globalization, if the educational experiences of business education curriculum cannot empower students to meet the impacts and challenges of globalization. Based on the finding of this study, it was recommended amongst others that; business education program should not only be rated as a business teacher training program but should also be seen as a program that prepares its recipients for the world of business and as such should incorporate modern business skills in the curriculum that will prepare the recipients to face the modern trends in business.*

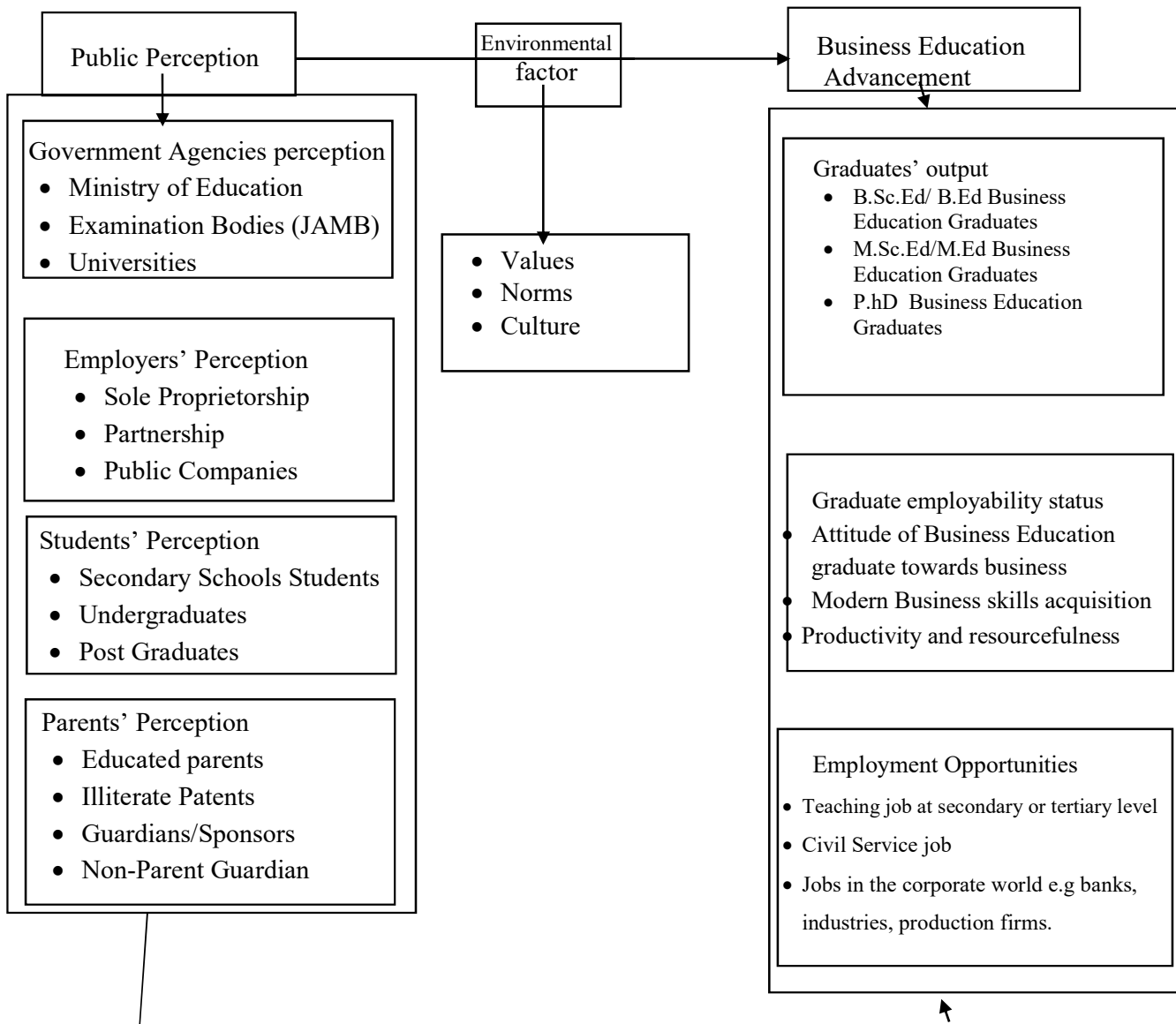
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### **INTRODUCTION**

Business education definition is hinged on two aspects which include education about business and education for business. Education about business which is aimed at contributing to the objectives of general education aims at equipping every citizen of a society with knowledge about business activities in the society and making recipients wise producers and consumers of business products. Education for business prepares beneficiaries for careers in business. Business education is designed to equip its recipients with skills, ability and knowledge to function as business teacher or as business executive. But on the contrary, graduates of business education are not granted placement in business offices and corporate world due to the fact that they are usually considered ill-equipped to serve as office executives. Even in the civil service they are usually placed on second feeders to their management sciences counterparts and are usually offered placements in the classroom. It is on this back drop that the researcher tends to find out what perception do the public have as it regards the study of business education. In carrying out the research, the researcher tends to find out if business education as a course of study is gaining a favourable public perception or an unfavourable public perception. Ubulom, in Udoh (2014) opined that one of the objectives of business education is to acquire skills and competences required for the performance of basic business jobs. Could it be that the curriculum of business education courses are so shallow that the recipients are usually considered as half baked when it comes to facing the challenges of modern business functions? Is it that the government academic bodies has created a sort of perception by making the curriculum of business education a mere study of the rudiments of the business world? Has this created the background for the perceived unfavourable public perception? Is it that the non-inclusion of employable skills in the curriculum of the business education programme made the program a mere teachers teaching program? Previous research studies in perception has been carried out by various scholars. Adamu and Lilian (2017) investigated the influence of parents and peer group on choice of business education programme among secondary school students in Zaria metropolis, Kaduna state. Lilian Catherine and Kenneth (2020) conducted a study to investigate the perception of educators and students on the quality of service delivery in business education programme in public universities in Enugu State. Owenvbiugie and Edigbonya (2014) examined the perceptions of business education students on the relevance of entrepreneurship education at the colleges of education in Edo State, Nigeria. Edet and Udida (2019) studied business education programmes curriculum contents and acquisition of employability skills among graduates of universities in Cross Rivers State, Nigeria. These related studies were carried out but none of them covered the specific dimensions this study intends to

cover viz-a-viz perception of academic agencies such as Jamb, university lecturers in the department of business education, employers in the civil service and the corporate world. Also previous related studies have not been able to take into cognizance the effect of environmental variables such as; culture, norms and values as it relates to the subject of public perception and the advancement of business education programme in Rivers State to be specific. Hence the need for this research work, to bring to light the relationship between public perception of business education programme and the advancement of the programme with emphasis on the perception of government agencies, employers, students and most importantly the parents which previous related research work has not been able to cover. Hopefully this study will add to existing literature and will further assist future researchers in the course of their study.

**Conceptual Framework**



**Fig 1: Researcher's Conceptualization (2022)** of public perception and the advancement of business education programmes in Rivers State owned tertiary institutions

**Source:** Edokpolor, J. E. & Owenvbiugie, R. O. (2017). Business education in Nigeria: Issues, challenges and way forward for national development. *Journal of Collaborative Research and Development (JCRD)*, 5(1), 1-25.

## **Aim of the Study**

The aim of the study is to find the relationship between public perception and the advancement of business education programmes in State-Owned Tertiary Institutions.

## **Concept of Perception**

Perception could mean the way an individual thinks about something and has idea of what it is like; the way one notices things with one's senses of sight, hearing etc.; or the natural ability to understand or notice things quickly. It could imply the process of attaining awareness or understanding of sensory information. According to Qiong (2017), the word "perception" is from the Latin words *perception*, *perceptio*, and means collecting, receiving, comprehension with the mind or action of taking possession with the mind or senses. The perception process consists of three stages which are selection, organization and interpretation. Selection is the first stage in the process of perception during which individuals convert the environment stimuli into meaningful experience. In daily life, people are bombarded constantly by such a large variety of information that at a blink moment we may encounter these stimuli: the words we hear, the witness of an accident, the ticking of a clock, to name but a few. Since contemporary world embraces everything, there are countless stimuli arriving at our sensory organs simultaneously and waiting to be processed. However, one cannot perceive all the information available to us because in doing so we would experience information overload and disorder. Thus, we perceive only some of the information from the environment through a selective process.

Some persons make an analogy of this selective process to make a map. They claim that one cannot put everything into it when making a map; rather, they have to make generalizations and deletions, so that the unnecessary or unimportant information will be deleted or generalized, with the important information being marked in the map as proportionately (Varner & Beamer, 2006). Likewise, when being surrounded by many competing stimuli, we only pay attention to those stimuli which we are familiar with or interested in through the selective process of perception. Thus, the existence of perception's partiality will possibly cause misunderstandings in communication, just as Chen and Starosta (2007, p. 34) stated; the partiality of our perception is the origin of misunderstanding in interactions, especially when people are from different cultural backgrounds with diverse perception systems.

The next stage in perception process is organization. After selecting information from the outside world, there is need to organize it in some way by finding certain meaningful patterns (Gudykunst & Kim, 2007). This organization stage is accomplished by putting things or people into categories, and that is why it is also called categorization by some scholars. In this stage of perception, the social and physical events or objects we encounter will immediately have shape, colour, texture, size, etc. For example, when asked what a human being is, some people may describe it from the perspective of skin colour; others from that of race or nationality. If we close our eyes and think what our university library is, we experience an organized environment with an internal and external structure (Qiong, 2017). Furthermore, organization enables us to structure and give coherence to our general knowledge about people and the social world, providing typical patterns of behaviour and the range of likely variation between types of people, things and their characteristic actions and attributes. Again, perception at this stage enjoys two characteristics. While the first characteristic shows that the organizing process gives human perception structure, the second process demonstrates that human perception possesses stability (Ren, 2004). This means that after we select stimuli and put them into categories, the selected stimuli become durable.

## **Perception and the Communication Process**

Having established what communication and perception are, it becomes obvious therefore that the communication process is highly reliant on the perceptual process. In fact, perception helps the receiver of the message to make meaning out of the message he receives. And since we have also established the fact that during the communication process, the sender and the receiver constantly exchange roles, it becomes clear then that the interpretation of messages through the perceptual

"window" permeates the entire communication process. In explaining the nature of communication, Michael & Michael (1978) as cited in Folarin (2005) say that there are five attributes of communication. According to them, communication is transactional, effective, personal, instrumental and consumatory in nature. Among all these attributes, the transactional attribute is one of the most prominent. According to Michael and Michael, communication is transactional in the sense that both the sender and the receiver are constantly having an impact on each other through symbolic behaviour. In transactional relationships, the belief of the parties involved is very important, and Scott & Brydon (1997) say that "perceiving is believing." This means that what you perceive is what you believe, and what you believe is as a result of what you perceive. If indeed communication is transactional in nature, and transactions are based on beliefs, and beliefs can be equated to perception, then communication and perception are directly related. Scott and Brydon also propose the factors that influence perception in a communication process.

### **Concept of Business Education**

Business education is an educational programme that prepares people for employment in business related occupation or self-employment. The philosophy behind it is to prepare its graduates for work to earn their living and for the development of the society. The Federal Government of Nigeria (2014) stated as one of the national education goals; the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of his society. Equally, the National Council for Colleges of Education in Adegbenjo (2015) stated that the objective of Business education is to empower graduates with the right skills to engage in a life of work in the office as well as self-employment.

Business education is further seen as an educational programme which prepares students not only for entry into and advancement in job within the business but also prepares them to handle their own business affairs and to function intelligently as consumers and citizens. Consequently, its objectives include: to enable students to explore and learn about the world of work and the relevant interest and career areas of their choices, to help every student to become an intelligent consumer of goods and services, to provide the students with the necessary occupational information to enable them to understand the various occupations found in the world of work, to enable students to acquire skills in the fields of their choices, to enable students prepare for, choose, enter into and progress in occupation of their choice; and to enable the students to realize the business courses within their university preparatory programme (Osuala in Adegbenjo, 2015).

Going further, Amaewhule in Obiete, Nwazor and Vin-Mbah (2015) opined that business education encompasses knowledge, attitudes and skills required by every citizen in order to effectively manage their personal businesses and economic system. Also Atakpa (2011) stated that business education is an embodiment of vocational knowledge and skills needed for employment and advancement in a broad range of business careers. This means that business education is an education for business or training skills which is needed in business offices, clerical occupation and business policy analysis. In his own view, Okoye (2013) considered business education as an education programme that orientates students in: art of business making (marketing), typing and shorthand skills, service delivery, secretarial jobs, account clerking, stenography, office information system and management. The scholar further elaborated that business education prepares students in two interrelated areas; which are education for business and education about business.

Hence, education for business provides professional training in: method of business making, techniques in business making, tactics to attract clients and make profit, scheming ideas for profitable venture, and appropriate attitude and behaviour of a good business man. Also, education about business prepares individuals to know: how and when to buy goods for profitable outcome (in-season and out season), where to obtain goods for better sales, where to situate business for continued existence, when to make best sales (increased turnover rate), when to make sales for increased profit, tricks in season forecast for good business making, and self-conviction indicator

about risk taking in business (Okoye, 2013). Sadly, Business education programme has been implemented in Nigerian universities for over three decades; still, its graduates are plagued with biting unemployment despite the laudable prospects of this promising aspect of education (Edet & Udida, 2019). In spite of this, universities in Nigeria keep producing many liberal arts and theoretical business education graduates whose employability potentials look blurred. Many who are said to be employed are found to be unskilled, clueless and incompetent in discharging their assignment/duties. This observation aligns with Akuegw and Nwi-ue (2013) that universities graduating students possession of employability skills is significantly low.

### **Gainful Employment Theory**

The theory of gainful employment as propounded by Proser emphasizes that vocational education will be effective in proportion as the specific training and experiences for forming the right habits of doing and thinking are repeated to the point that these habit become fixed to the degree necessary for gainful employment. This is because the more a skill is practiced, the longer the mastery level. Therefore, if learners practice regularly with the necessary tools, facilities and technologies, they will become more equipped and skill in the use various office technologies. This will no doubt help the student to be familiar with them and be effective on such facilities and technologies. This will help them to become skillful in the use of relevant facilities and technologies needed for effective service delivery both as office workers and OTM educators.

The implication of these theories is that business education which is an integral part of vocational education will be effective in the training of skillful use of office technologies to learner because student will be exposed to practice and demonstrate with different types of office machines and technology. Correct handling of machines and manipulation of different office equipment used in modern office, using appropriate application programme in carrying out different function, as well as other office routine will be perfectly demonstrated in a manner that is most effective and efficient. Business education graduates will then be able to effectively teach office skills that will enable learners to fit properly into the office of any organization and perform professionally, the functions of a secretary or office manager which among others include relating the functions of the office to the whole organization, attending meetings and providing information as may be required, make accurate records of proceedings, filing and retrieving of information taking appropriate action independently when faced with chilling secretarial office problems, showing personal qualities and attributes conducive to tolerance and co-existence with the work group (NBTE, 2008).

### **Empirical Study**

Oko and Sampson (2022), the study examined the digital skills needed by business education graduate for global competitiveness in entrepreneurship development in Ebonyi State. The study was guided by two research questions{which} guided the study. The population of the study consisted Of 150 graduates of business education from three higher institutions in Ebonyi state (Ebonyi state university Abakaliki, Ebonyi State Collage of Education Ikwo and Alex-Ekwueme Federal University, Ikwo). The entire population was used for the study, as the population Was small and manageable size. A structured questionnaire containing 12 items was used for data collection. The instrument was validated by three experts. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The study found amongst others that graduates of business education needed all the digital skills in accounting and communication as listed in order to excel in entrepreneurship globally. The study therefore recommended that Education and career system should be made proactive and responsive by educational stakeholders to the present needs and problems of the future, through the provision of required skill- sets for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Nwosu, Amobi and Onyemaobi (2021) examined strategies for improving the quality of business education programme for better education service delivery in Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study and two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive survey

research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised 109 business educators from five tertiary institutions in Anambra State. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers. The instrument was subjected to a pilot test on 20 business educators in Enugu metropolis. The application of the Cronbach Alpha reliability test on the returned data yielded coefficient values of 0.84 and 0.88 for clusters B1 and B2 respectively with an overall reliability co-efficient value of 0.86 for internal consistency. Data collected from the respondents were analyzed using mean, standard deviation to answer the research questions and t-test for the hypotheses testing. Findings revealed that the challenges impeding the realization of quality in business education programme for better education service delivery include non-availability of contemporary equipment and tools for teaching and learning, inadequate funding, poor collaboration between business education and private sector, poor government attitude towards the management of business education, poor standards for enrolment of students into the business education programme and lack of professionalization of the business education programme among others. Findings also revealed that improving synergy and collaboration with private sector, reviewing the business education curriculum, providing funds for the business education programme, providing effective students mentoring services, encouraging and funding research activities and recruiting quality business educators among others are strategies for improving the quality of business education programme for better education service delivery. Other findings showed that business educators in colleges of education and universities did not differ in their opinion. Based on these findings, the researchers recommended among others, that the federal government should as a matter of urgency be committed towards ensuring that business education programme is properly supported by making funds available, provision of teaching and learning equipment and sponsoring research activities.

Sampson & Ordu (2020). The study focused on assessment of the need for employability skills acquisition contents in the curriculum of business teacher education programme (BTEP) in Nigeria. Two research questions guided the study. Descriptive survey research design (DSRD) was espoused. The population for the study remained 83 business education lecturers. The all-inclusive population was appraised. The research instrument was a well-thought-out questionnaire titled „Need for Employability Skills Acquisition Content in Business Education Questionnaire” (NESACBEQ)”. Three experts validated the instrument and an overall reliability correlation co-efficient of 0.79 was acquired by means of Cronbach Alpha method. Out of the 83 copies of the instrument disseminated, 78 copies were successfully regained as well as espoused for data analysis. The instrument was structured on a five-point ranking scale, with response categories as “Very High Extent”, “High Extent”, “Moderate Extent”, “Low Extent” and “Very Low Extent”. Mean ratings in addition to standard deviation were espoused to answer the research questions. Findings of the study indicated that emerging workplace technologies and global trends necessitate the integration of employability skills acquisition content in BTEP in Nigeria to a high extent. The study concluded that emerging workplace technologies and global trends are basic factors that demand the need for integrating employability skills content in the curriculum of BTEP in Nigeria. The study recommended that business educators must exploit beyond academic and technical curricula experiences by integrating the knowledge, skills, values, and competencies embedded in business education to multi-culture environments and labour. The study correspondingly suggested that curriculum planners in business education through relevant agencies ought to carry out a review of the business education curriculum to incorporate emerging workplace technologies into the curriculum in order to improve the employability opportunities of the students.

Wogboroma (2015) conducted a study on assessment of internet usage on business education students: Implication for effective teaching and learning in River State. Two research questions guided the study. A structured questionnaire served as main instrument of the study. Population for the study was 620 students while 250 were used as sample size. Mean rating was used to analyze the research questions. Findings of the study revealed that internet usage has effect on business education students. Based on the findings, it was concluded that internet usage is an indispensable

teaching and learning tool for any effective teaching and learning. It was recommended among others that business education students should be encouraged to be more effective in the use of the internet. The study carried out by Wogboroma is related to the present study on the ground that both studies involved networking technology in business education programme in tertiary institutions. However, Wogboroma focused on the use of internet technology in business education programme in tertiary institutions in Rivers State while the present study is concerned with the networking technology contents in business education programme in universities in south-south and south east Nigeria.

## **CONCLUSION**

Business education programmes will have no global focus in the era of globalization, if the educational experiences of business education curriculum cannot empower students to meet the impacts and challenges of globalization. The advent of globalization has brought about the new development, knowledge and skills into the business world. It is therefore expected of business education programmes to equip students with globalized workplace skills so that they can notice a trend and create wealth with it. In view this study, it was concluded that graduates of business education programmes would easily familiarize themselves with the diverse operations of the globalized workplace upon graduation when relevant technology and soft skills are integrated and implemented in content of business education curriculum.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations were made;

1. Business education program should not only be rated as a business teacher training program but should also be seen as a program that prepares its recipients for the world of business and as such should corporate modern business skills in the curriculum that will prepare the recipients to face the modern trends in business.
2. The nomenclature "education" attached to business education program should be reviewed to welcome favourable public perception about the program in contrast to the perception that the programme is just for training business studies teachers only.
3. Government at all level should acknowledge that the knowledge of business is very important for its citizens to develop entrepreneurial skills and as such give adequate incentives to encourage students to enroll in business education programmes.
4. Adequate publicity should be done to promote the advancement of business education programme so that the program will no longer be seen as "dumping ground" for applicants whose cut-off points in Jamb cannot secure them a place in their desire course of study
5. The government should as a matter of urgency be committed towards ensuring that business education programme is properly supported by making funds available, provision of teaching and learning equipment and sponsoring research activities
6. Stakeholders in business education should review the curriculum of business education to ensure that the curriculum is relevant to students' future needs.
7. Workshop should be organized for business educators to educate them on the appropriate teaching strategies to adopt so as to cater for individual differences in the classroom among others.
8. National Universities Commission (NUC) should urgently embark on an inclusive curriculum planners and developers as well as industry experts. This if done will provide the opportunity of appraising the in-use business education programmes curriculum with a view of spotting inherent weaknesses in terms of contents, pedagogy and relevance to the world of work
9. Universities offering undergraduate business education degree programmes should ensure that their programmes meet process evaluation criteria in order to prove them effective and efficient in planning and execution.

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