Abstract

The study investigated NCE business education graduate entrepreneurs’ rating of human resource management and customer management skills utilization in entrepreneurship in North Central States, Nigeria. The study which employed a descriptive survey identified two entrepreneurial skills which were human resource management skills and customer management skills. Two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated for the study. The entire registered 149 NCE business education graduate entrepreneurs operating in the North Central States, Nigeria constituted the population of the study. There was no sampling since the entire population was considered manageable. A structured 30-item questionnaire was adopted for the study. The reliability of the instrument was ascertained using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) to obtain r-coefficients of 0.82 and 0.76, respectively for clusters B1-B2 of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to the 149 NCE business education graduate entrepreneurs in the North Central States, Nigeria. Four copies of the questionnaire were not returned and so 145 copies were used for the study. The research questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation. T-test and ANOVA were used to test the null hypotheses of the study at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed among others that customer management skills are sometimes utilized in
entrepreneurship. While human resource management skills are often used. With respect to the findings, recommendations were put forward, among which was the Commission (NCCE), in collaboration with professionals in business and entrepreneurship education, established entrepreneurs and authorities in colleges of education, should restructure/review the instructional content of entrepreneurship education in particular and business education in general in order to meet the entrepreneurial needs of the students and the society at large.

Key Words: Human Resource management skills, Customer Management skills, Entrepreneurial skills Utilization, Entrepreneurship.

Nigeria is a country with promising potentials and ability to cater to her teeming population in all ramifications. This submission might be because of the vast human and material resources available in the country. However, in spite of such rich endowments in human, material and natural resources, most people are still very poor. A large number of graduates are unemployed or unemployable because they lack saleable skills and competencies. Baba (2013) states that unemployment situation has posed significant challenges to the very existence of individuals in most developing nations, thereby calling for the training of men and women to function effectively in the society through entrepreneurship. This is necessary to transform the youths to be confident, productive and purposeful individuals who can fill employment gaps and create jobs.

Entrepreneurship is the recognition of an opportunity to create value, and the process of acting on the occasion (Anachobi, 2010). It also involves the formation and management of a new business entity (Offiong, Caleb & Effiong, 2017). It is a process of generating sound investment ideas and applications thereof. The applications may be in creating new firms, new jobs, new relationships, and new methods of production or new ways of doing things generally or modifying and improving on the existing ones to enhance their value. On the other hand, entrepreneurship education aims at raising awareness of students about business skills, knowledge, promoting creativity, innovation and self-employment. This includes the acquisition of skills in areas that will be useful to make them self-reliant, independent and productive citizens of the society (Offor, 2013).

According to Haruna (2012) human resource management skills have to do with entrepreneurs possessing excellent human relation skills. This is another success factor in entrepreneurship. The entrepreneur is the human factor that organizes other factors of production such as land, labour, and capital to achieve the goals of entrepreneurship. Human resource management skills entail the ability of the entrepreneur to relate well with co-workers, accept criticisms, advice, and suggestions from others, exercise confidence, good judgment and bring about increased customer
satisfaction through innovation. Human resource management skills are essential in entrepreneurship of any kind in that it equips the entrepreneur with skills necessary to evaluate potential employees, hire and train workers and put them in appropriate positions.

Customer management skills are entrepreneurial skills related to attitude and ability to relate with customers effectively for the good and success of the organization (Chikezie, 2014). The author further states that customer management skills are most needed to withstand competitions from other rivals and competitors. The entrepreneur must aim at satisfying the need of his customers in order to remain in business, otherwise, he will close shop. Therefore, the entrepreneur needs to be equipped with customer management skills or ability to identify the needs of customers and work towards their satisfaction, ability to work with people, possession of social poise, self-assurance and confidence, consideration for others, exhibition of self-control, tact, empathy and so on.

A rating of something is a score or measurement of how good or popular it is. Hornsby (2015) opines that rating is the evaluation or assessment of something in terms of quality, quantity or some combination of both. Olaniyi (2016) maintain that rating is a broad conceptual term which refers to the appraisal of the characteristics, significance, importance or relative value of a person, organization or thing. Ezenwafor (2014) sees skills as aptitudes and abilities appropriate for a specific job. In other words, a skillful person is someone very good at what he is doing. Entrepreneurship skills, therefore, are the abilities and aptitudes that enable someone survive, and succeed in entrepreneurship. Ezenwafor (2014) sees entrepreneurship skills as competencies and capabilities that will allow an individual to become productive, successful and independent.

Skills utilization, according to Payne (2013) can, in no small extent, boost the entrepreneur’s performance. Skills utilization is simply about making sure that an entrepreneur maximizes the use of the skills that he or his employees possess. To that effect, practical skills utilization refers to a matching of the powers possessed by workers and the skills needed to do the job. Skills utilization is a crucial element of workforce planning that a business of any size and type can use to improve business performance.

There is no gain saying that every entrepreneur that is worth his salt must have human resource management skills necessary to evaluate potential employees, hires and train workers and put them in appropriate positions in the business. This implies being a good judge of character, finding employees who will work well together and ensuring that employees are qualified and suitable for the job. It is necessary for a successful entrepreneur to have the required ability to manage teams, oversee conflicts, resolve disputes and provide necessary training to workers in order to ensure high-quality performance which will lead to high productivity and general success of the entrepreneur in his venture.
Statement of the Problem

It is a fact that paid employment cannot be provided for all graduates. For this reason, the Federal Government of Nigeria introduced entrepreneurship education for undergraduates of all programmes in tertiary institutions with the hope that it will reduce unemployment, enhance self-reliance and accelerate national development. Although many NCE graduates of business education are taking to the option of self-employment drawing from the skills they were exposed to during training to succeed, the unemployment situation does not seem to be decreasing especially in respect to NCE business education graduates. According to Okoye and Udemb (2015), it is evident that many graduates of business education still roam the streets in search of non-existent white collar jobs. This situation raises a question about the effectiveness of the entrepreneurship programme in business education.

Entrepreneurship education was designed to teach in the students attitudes and skills needed for productive entrepreneurial engagements. Such skills include human resource management skills and customer management skills. However, little is known about the extent to which the skills are useful or are being utilized. Observations and anecdotes suggest that in the North Central States of Nigeria, many of the NCE business education graduates are engaged in one form of entrepreneurship activity or the other, with various levels of success. The question, however, is to what extent are they utilizing the various entrepreneurial skills acquired in the course of their studies? If answers are not provided to the question, colleges of education may continue to emphasize skills that are not all that useful in real-life entrepreneurship while neglecting those which are indispensable. Moreover, businesses may fail, and unemployment may continue to rise. Therefore, this study determined rating of human resource management and customer management skills utilization in entrepreneurship by business education graduate entrepreneurs in the North Central States of Nigeria.
Purpose of the Study
The main purpose of the study was to determine the extent of business education graduate entrepreneurs’ ratings of the utilization of their entrepreneurial skills in entrepreneurship in the North Central States of Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined:
2. Business education graduate entrepreneurs’ rating of the extent of their utilization of customer management skills in entrepreneurship.

Research Questions
The following research questions guided the study:
1. How do business education graduate entrepreneurs’ rate the extent of their utilization of human resource management skills in entrepreneurship?
2. How do business education graduate entrepreneurs’ rate the extent of their utilization of customer management skills in entrepreneurship?

Research Hypotheses
The research hypotheses stated below were tested at 0.05 levels of significance.
Ho1. Business education graduate entrepreneurs do not differ significantly in their ratings of the extent of human resource management skills utilization in entrepreneurship based on the location of the business.
Ho2. Business education graduate entrepreneurs do not differ significantly in their ratings of the extent of customer management skills utilization in entrepreneurship based on gender.

Method
The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Arua (2008) posits that when an investigation centers on individuals and their opinions, the best research design to use is descriptive survey research. Also, Nworgu (2015) opines that descriptive survey research design is used to collect data from every member of a population or a carefully selected sample to determine their opinions, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors. This study was aimed at assessing the ratings of entrepreneurial skills utilization in entrepreneurship by business education graduate entrepreneurs in North Central States of Nigeria. The population of the study comprised 149 NCE business education graduate entrepreneurs who are engaged in one type of entrepreneurship or the other, and whose business were registered with the ministry of commerce and industry of the various states in the North Central States, Nigeria. The entire population was used for the study because of its manageable size; hence, there was no sampling. The data for the study was collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire...
contains 30-items and in two sections; A and B. Section B was made of B1 and B2 according to the research questions. Each group of section B contained 15 items on human resource management skills and customer management skills respectively. Also, section B was a 5-point Likert Type rating scale of very often utilized (VOU), often utilized (OU), sometimes utilized (SU), rarely utilized (RU), and not utilized (NU). Three experts in business education validated the questionnaire. The questionnaire has reliability index of 0.82 and 0.76 which was established through a pilot study on 15 NCE business education graduate entrepreneurs in Edo State. The internal consistency of the instrument was determined using Cronbach alpha procedure. Copies of the questionnaire were administered and collected by the researchers with the assistance of the research assistants who were properly briefed on how to go about it. A total of 149 copies of the questionnaire were distributed out of which 145 copies were retrieved and found useable. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics computed include mean and standard deviation. While the inferential statistics computed were t-test and analysis of variance (F-ratio)

Research Question One

How do the business education graduate entrepreneurs rate the extent of their Utilization of human resource management skills in entrepreneurship?

Data collected in respect of this research question are presented in Table 1

Table 1: Business Education Graduate Entrepreneurs’ Rating of the Items on the Utilization of Human Resource Management Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Indicate the extent to which you utilize the following human resource management skills</th>
<th>( \bar{x} )</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Demonstration of good interpersonal skills to relate with and manage employees for optimal performance</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.60</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>VOU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Possession and demonstration of good communication skills to relate well with the employees</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.74</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>OU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Spirit of team work to effectively manage my staff for optimal performance and productivity</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>OU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Good leadership skills to manage the staff effectively</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>OU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Good communication Skills to effectively explain issues and resolve conflict among employees for the good and growth of the business</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.77</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>OU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Understanding weaknesses and strengths of others for effective management of the staff</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>SU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Motivation of workers for improved performance and productivity</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>OU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Evaluating potential employees with the view to hire and train them and put them in appropriate positions</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>OU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Exhibition of spirit of empathy and fairness with my staff.</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>OU</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The result in Table one shows the means, standard deviation, rank, and interpretations of business education graduate entrepreneurs’ rating of the items on human resource management skills. The highest mean score of this cluster is 4.60 (item 1) indicating standard deviation of 0.51, and the lowest mean rating is 2.94 (item 11) with a standard deviation of 1.03. Apart from items 1, 6 and 11, respondents rated the other twelve items (9, 8, 14, 15, 3, 5, 4, 7, 13, 2, 12 and 10) with mean rating of 3.87 to 3.59 as often utilized. Item 11 with means 4.60 and standard deviation of 0.51 was rated as very often used, while items 6 and 11 with means of 2.99 and 2.94 and standard deviation of 1.06 and 1.03 respectively were rated as sometimes utilized.

Items 1, 9, 8, 14 and 15 in that order top the ranking, while, items 11, 6, 10, 12 and 2 occupy the bottom of the ranking while items 3, 5, 4, 7 and 13 hold the middle. The grand weighted mean of 3.71 with a standard deviation of 0.73 indicates that this group of entrepreneurs generally rated human resource management skills as often utilized. The standard deviation of 0.73 implies that the respondents were close in their ratings to the presented items.

**Research Question Two**

How do the business education graduate entrepreneurs rate the extent of their utilization of customer management skills in entrepreneurship?

Data collected in respect of this research question are presented in Table 2
<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Ensuring that customers are always satisfied with the products/services through proper feedback mechanism.</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>0.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Ensuring that customers get the true value for their money by producing quality products and rendering quality services</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>1.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Continually soliciting for new customers and ensuring their retention by rendering quality services and mutual understanding</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>0.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Good networking, rapport and mutual cooperation with my contemporaries and customers</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Understanding regulatory requirements relating to labour, employment, and customer services</td>
<td>3.04</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Developing matching strengths and momentum for survival and success in business through mutual and beneficial interaction with my customers</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Exhibition of self control, tact and empathy with customers</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Putting one’s self in other people’s (employees’ and customers’) shoes to fully understand their feelings and show them that I care</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Avoidance of the use of foul language and demonstration of I don’t care attitude to customers</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Exhibition of social poise, self control and confidence with respect to customers</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Ability to deal with many customers at the same time without losing focus and attention</td>
<td>2.92</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Ability to read customers’ mind set through body language (positive or negative) and benefit from it for improved management of the business</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Skills to listen to customers to understand their feelings and respond appropriately</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>1.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Successful management of negative and/or positive feedback from customers</td>
<td>2.98</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Grand Weighted Mean**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Field Survey, 2019.

Table 2 shows the analysis of the mean, standard deviation, rank, and interpretations of business education graduate entrepreneurs’ rating of items on the utilization of customer management skills. The table reveals that the maximum and minimum mean scores computed are 4.11 for item 25 and 2.92 for item 20 with a standard deviation of 0.66 and 0.96 respectively. The respondents’ rated twelve items (16, 23, 26, 28, 21, 24,
18, 29, 30, 20, 22, and 27) on customer management skills as sometimes utilized with mean ratings ranging between 3.30 and 2.92. Items 25, 17 and 19 with means of 4.11, 4.01 and 3.87 and standard deviation of 0.66, 0.75 and 0.53 respectively are each rated as often utilized. Items 25, 17, 19, 16 and 23 take top positions on the ranking of respondents’ ratings of items on this skill, while items 27, 22, 20, 30, and 29 are the least and items 28, 26, 21, 24 and 18 occupy the middle of the table. A grand weighted mean of 3.02 and a standard deviation of 0.92 indicate that the entrepreneurs generally consider customer management skills as skills they sometimes utilize. The grand standard deviation of 0.92 indicates fair cohesiveness of respondents rating of the items.

Table 3: Summary of T-test Analysis Showing the Difference between the mean ratings of Urban and Semi-urban Based Business Education Graduate Entrepreneurs on the Extent of their Utilization of Human Resource Management Skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>$\bar{x}$</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Sig. level</th>
<th>Conclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>60.70</td>
<td>4.98</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td>*NS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-urban</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>60.64</td>
<td>4.82</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P<0.05, *NS ≡ Not Significance

Table 3 shows the t-test analysis result of the hypothesis. The table indicated that the t-value of 0.068 computed is significant at 0.146 level of significance. Since this level of significance is greater than the hypothesized (alpha level) P<0.05, the null hypothesis stated was retained. Therefore it was concluded that there is no significance difference between urban and semi-urban NCE business education graduate entrepreneurs in their ratings of the extent of their utilization of human resource management skills in entrepreneurship.

H0: Business education graduate entrepreneurs do not differ significantly in their rating of the extent of customer management skills utilization in entrepreneurship on the basis of sex.

Table 4: Summary of t-test Analysis showing the Difference in Rating of the Utilization of Customer Management Skills by Male and Female Business Education Graduate Entrepreneurs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparison variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>$\bar{x}$</th>
<th>S</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>sig. level</th>
<th>conclusion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>49.40</td>
<td>13.20</td>
<td>0.727</td>
<td>1.46</td>
<td>NS*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>47.93</td>
<td>10.92</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P<0.05, *NS ≡ Not Significance
The result of the t-test analysis is shown in table 4. The table shows that the computed t-value of 0.727 is statistically significant from 1.46 levels. Since this level of significance is greater than the hypothesized (alpha level) of P<0.05, the hypothesis was not rejected. The implication of this revelation therefore, is that male and female NCE business education graduate entrepreneurs do not differ significantly in their ratings of the extent of utilization of customer management skills in their business.

Discussion of the Findings

The study determined business education graduate entrepreneurs’ rating of the extent of their utilization of entrepreneurial skills in their businesses. Two entrepreneurial skills were examined in the study namely human resource management skills and customer management skills.

Table 1 data shows that business education graduate entrepreneurs generally rated human resource management skills as often utilized. This is no surprise considering that Nwafor (2007) views human resource as the most important resource and the ability to manage them effectively is a major key to business success. Every entrepreneur regardless of sex, and location should be able to manage workers, oversee conflicts, resolve disputes and provide the necessary training to workers for high performance and productivity for the success of the business. It is perhaps for this reason, that Uzo-Okonkwo and Oduh’s (2017) respondents (small scale business operators) in Anambra State rated human resource management skills as a much needed entrepreneurial competence for fresh graduates of business education. Again, Osaghale (2017) found that business educators in entrepreneurship in Edo and Delta States rated leadership and communication skills content of the curriculum as relevant to a high extent for doing business.

It is also interesting, presumably for the same reason that the study indicated that business education graduate entrepreneurs do not differ significantly in their ratings on the extent of utilization of human resource management skills in their businesses based on differences in location (table 3). It is obvious and self evident that human resource management is both challenging and required by entrepreneurs in both urban and semi-urban locations.

This study’s finding on the extent of the utilization of customer management skills by business education graduate entrepreneurs indicates that they sometimes (table 2) employ this skill in their businesses. This is contrary to common expectation in view of the importance of these skills. Ademiluyi (2007) found that communication skills, which include customer relation skills, are highly needed by the entrepreneur to be successful in business. Nwafor and Odigili (2015) have determined that a critical personal skill, under which customer management skill is subsumed, is a highly essential entrepreneurial skill for successful entrepreneurship.

Another related finding of this study that male and female business education graduate entrepreneurs comparatively rated their utilization of customer management
skills alike, (table 2) agrees with Akarahu and Baba (2011) who found that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female respondents on human relation skills (customer management skills) required by office education graduates for self sustainability. Similarly, Nwazor and Odigili (2015) found no significant sex difference in rating of personal skills, customer management skills inclusive, by business education graduates in Delta State. This finding is also in agreement with Olaniyi (2016) who argued that skills needed in small and medium enterprises are not gender sensitive and could not be influenced differently. These findings are a pointer to the fact that these entrepreneurs regardless of gender are facing the same challenges with respect to customer management skills. This may be why Laroche & Mcdougal (2000) have suggested that an entrepreneur should attend courses to improve skills of customer services, entailing how entrepreneur can manage their customers appropriately to ensure better patronage and profitability. Customer management skills should be deliberately taught in schools (Balderson, 2000).

Conclusion

This study reveals that business education graduate entrepreneurs do not utilize to the maximum the various entrepreneurial skills for successful management of their business. This could be one of the reasons for the reported increase in business failures, unemployment and phobia for self enterprise.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, discussion and conclusion drawn, the following recommendations are made: Based on the findings of this study, discussion and conclusion drawn, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Commission (NCCE), in collaboration with professionals in business and entrepreneurship education, established entrepreneurs and authorities in colleges of education, should restructure/review the instructional content of entrepreneurship education in particular and business education in general in order to meet the entrepreneurial needs of the students and the society at large. To this end, course contents capable of preparing and equipping business education students for entrepreneurial skills acquisition and utilization for self-reliance must be pursued vigorously. To achieve this, it is also recommended that the curriculum of business education must be reviewed periodically with a view to dropping courses that are no longer relevant in today’s world of business and replacing them with new courses that have relevance which will develop all aspects of human resource management skills and customer management skills, in order to enable business education graduates to utilize them very often for successful entrepreneurship and to meet up with the dictates of the changing times of self-employment.

2. Skills, such of human resource management, though, rated as often utilized by business education graduate entrepreneurs should equally be improved upon in terms of
content and delivery by relevant agencies and stakeholders to ensure that their utilization gets to higher levels in order to guarantee successful management of businesses.

3. The National Communication for Colleges of Education (NCCE) by its special position as a monitoring and supervising body over all the colleges of education in Nigeria should maintain regular and proper accreditation visits to colleges of education. This would force the authorities of various colleges of education to provide adequate materials, personnel and facilities necessary for the effective teaching of entrepreneurship in business education. The researcher believes that when adequate teaching facilities are available, students would be well taught and better equipped to put the various entrepreneurial skills they learnt into proper use.

References


