



Correlates of Self-Employability Skills and Sustainable Economic Development: Empirical Synthesis of Business Education Students Of Public Universities In Cross River State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The increasing rate of unemployment among graduates in Nigeria, along with its linked social and economic issues, is cause for concern. This largely stems from a failure to provide these graduates with the necessary skills that would allow them to contribute appropriately to economic activities and growth. Hence, this study aims to explore the relationship between the self-employability skills of Business Education students in higher education and sustainable economic growth in Cross River State, Nigeria. The research employed a descriptive survey methodology with two research questions phrased as hypotheses to guide the investigation. The research population consisted of 1,418 Business Education students from the University of Calabar and Cross River University of Technology. From this population, 142 students, or 10% of the total population were selected through stratified, purposive, and simple random sampling techniques. Data was gathered through a detailed and authorized questionnaire, titled "Self-Employability Skills for Sustainable Economic Development Questionnaire" (SESSEDQ). This data was analyzed with Pearson Product Moment Correlation analyses, using SPSS version 21.0 to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. Distinguished findings showed that there is indeed a significant positive relationship between students' Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills, managerial skills, and sustainable economic development. Consequently, it was recommended amidst others that both government and education stakeholders should provide state-of-the-art ICT resources in Business Education resource rooms and lecture theatres to promote hand-on

experience for students. This will aid in better skill-oriented teaching and practical learning experiences, enabling students to acquire self-employability skills.

Keywords: Self-employability, Skills, Business Education, Sustainable, Economic Development.

I. Introduction

The economic sustainability of any nation in the new era of knowledge-driven economies, artificial intelligence, and technological revolutions is premised on the capacity of its skilled workforce. As a result, acquiring honed competencies is critical for the efficient performance of germane economic activities, in which education plays a critical role. Putting this perspective into context brings to the fore the relevance of inculcating undergraduates at universities with skilled knowledge and abilities through education, training, retraining, and experience, apt to upscale their self-employability skills for effective enterprise performance, productivity, and sustainable economic development [1]. Skilled entrepreneurs are prime factors in achieving high enterprise performance, which is a key index in measuring the extent to which an enterprise's 'big idea' is achieved. Apparently, skilled entrepreneurs are knowledgeable producers, critical and creative thinkers, and problem solvers who are able to apply their skilled knowledge, abilities, and cognate experiences to improve their lives and contribute significantly to sustainable economic development. Also, they contribute immensely to alleviating the societies in which they live and the world at large from endemic patterns of unemployment, underemployment, poverty, and their causal socioeconomic effects, thereby improving the



standard of living for all. Unfortunately, there is a high dearth of entrepreneurs of this nature, and that constitutes a major gap in attaining sustainable economic development in regions like Nigeria and parts of the developing world.

To ensure success in an ever-changing and competitive market, a business enterprise requires a set of competencies. Skills represent the capability to perform tasks effectively, typically obtained through education, training, or hands-on experience. These aptitudes serve as the valuable resources entrepreneurs harness to address changing societal needs. It also refers to hands-on tasks that enhance one's employability, self-sufficiency, and overall relevance to both themselves and society in general [2]. Any skill that enables an individual to start a business and sustain it are termed self-employability skills. The acquisition and application of self-employability skills produce competent, productive, and self-employed individuals who are useful for the value or utility they create.

According to [3], self-employment entails initiating and effectively managing a prosperous business or social venture. It is a lifestyle decision that can be realized by establishing a business, either as a full-time endeavour or alongside a part-time occupation, operating as an independent freelancer or contractor, or investing in a franchise opportunity. Self-employment therefore, is a situation whereby individuals engage in any legit economic activity and manage it on their own. [4] averred that self-employment is a situation whereby an individual engages in a trade or profession independently, whether as a sole proprietor, partner in a partnership or corporation, independent contractor, or consultant, and earns income from this endeavour. However, it is essential for the individual to show that their primary objective is to run this business with the intent of generating a profit. The skills required for such businesses are self-employability skills. As the subject of this discourse, the self-employability skills of business education graduates are skills that prepare business education graduates to operate their own businesses proficiently and maximize the accompanying gains for sustainable economic development. Business education graduates require a diverse set of abilities, including interpersonal skills, creativity, managerial expertise, proficiency in information technology, and problem-solving capabilities, among others, to effectively operate various business ventures [5].

Business Education, in the view of [6], is an educational programme that is specifically

designed to instil in individuals the skills, knowledge, business spirit, and acumen required to thrive in the workplace and achieve self-sufficiency. [7] opined that Business Education encompasses a wide-ranging field incorporated into various levels of education, spanning from primary and secondary schools to higher education institutions. It covers subject areas such as office-related skills, distribution and marketing occupations, accounting, business teaching, business administration, business management, typewriting, shorthand, and secretarial studies. Furthermore, Business Education is a programme of study structured to produce highly responsible, productive, and self-reliant individuals that will significantly contribute to the development of Nigerian society through the wide range of functional skills acquired. [8] asserted that many Business Education graduates who venture into self-employment or related business positions often lack essential skills and competencies in managing business operations, marketing and utilizing technology for business promotion, and maintaining accurate financial records. These deficiencies often jeopardize the prospects of success, sustainability, and lead to a higher likelihood of failure [9,10].

The present age, marked by the widespread utilization of technological consumables, relies on proficiency in information and communication technology skills as essential tools for attaining success and sustainability in business. According to [11], ICT skills are abilities or skills in the technologies that individuals deploy to exchange, disseminate, and generate information, and to communicate via computer systems and networks. [12] stated that ICT for sustainability can be divided into two categories: sustainability in ICT and sustainability by ICT. "Sustainability in ICT" involves making ICT products and services more environmentally sustainable throughout their entire life cycle, primarily by minimizing their energy and resource consumption. On the other hand, "sustainability by ICT" refers to the use of ICT to foster sustainable practices in production and consumption, thus, contributing to a more eco-friendly approach to economic activities.

Both concepts inherent in ICT for sustainability are required in order to create and promote decent job opportunities, socioeconomic growth, poverty reduction and eradication, creativity, innovation, and enterprising individuals and societies. Tech skills, as an aspect of ICT skills, are top in-demand and saleable skills that



create unlimited business, employment, and wealth creation opportunities for those in possession of the skills, thereby positioning them as high economic inputs in achieving sustainable development [13,14].

Likewise, [15] conducted an empirical study to investigate how the acceleration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has influenced human development in 49 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. This analysis focuses on key ICT factors, including mobile phone adoption, telephone access, and internet penetration per 100 inhabitants from 2000-2012. The research findings revealed a positive correlation between the sustainable development agenda, goals, and policies crafted to promote ICT growth and utilization, especially in the context of mobile phones, telephones, and internet access.

A study by [16] used a panel VAR model to examine the relationship between ICT development and four other economic indicators for G-20 countries between 1991 and 2012. The study found a positive correlation between the expansion of ICT infrastructure and economic growth. Additionally, the study establishes long-term causal links among these variables. In the same vein of thought, [17] noted that a significant portion of students have access to computers and internet facilities, both at home and at universities. Consequently, they possess certain skills such as familiarity with Microsoft Word and PowerPoint, internet searching, social networking, email usage, file uploading, and playing video games. However, despite these proficiencies, it's evident that they lack other skills, such as effectively utilizing e-libraries, participating in online discussion forums, and engaging in blogging.

Furthermore, [18] went on to say that the students learned these ICT skills through a variety of methods, including self-learning through handbooks and manuals, guidance from friends, and courses offered at their respective educational institutions. Interestingly, [17] observed that many students often divert their attention to various computer-related activities instead of prioritizing their academic work. This tendency may be attributed to the belief held by most students that ICT tools facilitate their learning, possibly because of the convenience and accessibility they offer. Conversely, [8] examined the level of managerial and ICT skills among graduating students of Business Education for entrepreneurial success from Universities in South-South Nigeria, and they were notably found to be insufficient.

Managerial skills are crucial competencies necessary for most jobs, aiding employees in job retention and advancement. These skills are adaptable across various contexts and play a vital role in gaining employment [19]. In the view of [20], managerial skills encompasses technical expertise, interpersonal abilities, conceptual thinking, problem-solving, creativity, effective communication, innovative knowledge utilization, financial acumen, and civic responsibilities. Managers and entrepreneurs need these skills to identify business opportunities, establish objectives, and formulate strategies. These management skills enable the entrepreneur or manager to establish organizational structures with clear responsibilities and control, which are essential for success [21].

In a study conducted in Rivers and Bayelsa State of Nigeria by [22] on managerial skills considered necessary for the success of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs.) in curbing social vices, it was confirmed that these managerial skills are highly important for the success of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in combating social vices, with no significant impact from the manager's years of experience. Another study in Rivers State was conducted by [23] to ascertain the personal, managerial, and problem solving skills needed by Business Education postgraduate students for entrepreneurial development. The study identified key managerial skills needed by business education undergraduate students for entrepreneurial development, including communication skills, empathy, decision making, critical thinking, flexibility, and stress management.

In a similar study conducted by [6] to assess self-employment skills required by business education students in South-Western Colleges of Education, Nigeria, for national development. The study acknowledged that Business Education students should possess crucial abilities such as effective time management and self-motivation skills for self-employment and national development. In the same vein, [24] focuses on Business Education students' perceptions of essential skills for successful entrepreneurship in Nigeria. The study underscored the significance of technical and financial management skills for these students to thrive in Nigeria's challenging economic and business landscape. Furthermore, [25] recognized tolerance, communication, creative thinking, problem solving, goal setting, decision making, record keeping, and general management as pivotal entrepreneurial skills in Technical and



Vocational Education and Training. Acquiring these skills empowers young graduates to make informed decisions that benefit businesses, effectively manage their enterprises, maintain accurate business records, and more, all contributing to their success. It implies that the ability of Business Education graduates to acquire the needed managerial skills is an indication that the country is focusing on sustainable economic transformation.

Sustainable economic transformation is a national initiative built on unique local economic assets to address individual challenges and provide quantifiable real-world benefits. It is a practically realistic concept that tailors strategies to work for local people's socioeconomic gains, businesses, and institutions and in support of poverty reduction and eradication programmes that may be common from place to place. But solutions must be inclusive of the political, social, and economic realities of a location if they are to create real and meaningful change [26]. [27], examined the contributions of TVET to sustainable economic development in workforce development, poverty reduction/wealth creation for societal peace and security in Enugu State, Nigeria. The findings revealed 31 contributions of TVET to economic development with respect to workforce development, poverty reduction/wealth creation, and global security, among others. It was recommended that proper administration of TVET is needed in Enugu State in order to facilitate the achievement of the objectives that are set for the programmes, and that more effort should be made toward planning, organizing, controlling, directing, implementing, and evaluating TVET programmes for the realization of sustainable economic development and global peace and security.

Statement of the problem

Going by the objectives of Business Education as a type of education that is designed to inculcate in individuals the skills, knowledge, business spirit, and acumen needed to thrive in the world of work/business, and to become self-reliant. Business Education graduates who have gone through the undergraduate programme in tertiary institutions are expected to have acquired self-employability skills such as managerial skills, ICT skills, time management skills, self-motivation skills, interpersonal skills, financial management skills, human resource management skills, planning skills, marketing skills, and customer service skills that will enable them to identify business opportunities, initiate business ideas, own and

effectively manage their businesses, and become employers of labour. Unfortunately, this is not the case in the Nigeria context today. Personal observation and careful study of the situation shows that the clientele of business education still lacks the requisite self-employability skills needed by business education graduates for self-employment, and to become employers of labour. Thus, the emergence of accelerated patterns of business education graduates unemployment index in Cross River State.

This situation has a negative impact on the standard of living of those who are affected by it. It has become a matter of deep concern how this socioeconomic plague of unemployment or underemployment is having a negative multiplier effect on Nigerian graduates from various professions, especially Business Education graduates; subjecting many to becoming 'career job seekers' of jobs that are rarely available instead of creators of jobs and employers of labour, suffering untold hardship and poverty instead of creating wealth. Consequently, the frustration has plunged many into all forms unlawful indulgence that are detrimental to oneself and the larger society. Therefore, lack of self-employability skills by Business Education graduates has become a topical issue of public concern, calling for a more pragmatic skill-oriented approach to achieving the major objective of the business education programme, which is centred on inculcating in the recipients relevant and adaptable business knowledge and skills (self-employability) for self-reliance. Conversely, Business Education, which is meant to equip the individual with saleable and self-employability skills, has failed in its mandate. It implies that the delivery of Business Education academic programme in most Nigerian tertiary institutions is inadequate and inconsistent in equipping students with the self-employability skills required for sustainable economic development. Hence, this study is poised to find out if there is any relationship between ICT skills, managerial skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between self-employability skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State. Specifically, the study sought to examine the relationship between:



1. ICT skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State.
2. Managerial skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State.

Research questions

1. What is the relationship between ICT skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State?
2. What is the relationship between managerial skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State?

Research hypotheses

1. There is no significant relationship between ICT skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State.
2. There is no significant relationship between managerial skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State.

II. Methodology

The research design employed for this study was a descriptive survey research design. This design is used in exploratory and preliminary studies to allow for the collection, summation,

presentation, and interpretation of information for the primary purpose of clarification [28]. The study area covered in this research is the Calabar Metropolis, which serves as the capital city of Cross River State. Calabar is divided into two parts: Calabar Municipality and Calabar South Local Government Area, situated in the Southern Senatorial District of the State. The study population consists of 1,418 students pursuing business education, drawn from the University of Calabar and Cross River University of Technology, which is now the University of Cross River State. The population breakdown is detailed in Table 1. A multistage sampling technique was used to select participants for the study, which included the use of stratified random, purposive, and simple random sampling techniques to select ten percent (10%) of the total population, representing 142 Business Education students, who actually participated in the study. A researcher-created questionnaire titled "Self-Employability Skills for Sustainable Economic Development Questionnaire" (SESSEDQ) was used to collect data. These were to elicit appropriate responses from Business Education students on statements related to the hypotheses of the study. The questionnaire was a four-point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). Data collected was subjected to analysis using simple linear regression statistical tools with the help of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS version 21.0).

Table 1

Population distribution by Institution and Years of studies

YEARS	UNICAL	UNICROSS	TOTAL	UNICAL	CRUTECH	TOTAL
	Population	Population	Population	Sample	Sample	Sample
1	115	170	285	12	17	29
2	160	196	356	16	20	36
3	118	234	352	12	23	35
4	145	280	425	14	28	42
Total	538	880	1,418	54	88	142

Source: Field survey 2022

Presentation of results

The result of this study is presented in two folds; first, the research questions were answered and second, the hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance.

Research question one

What is the relationship between ICT skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State?



Table 2

The relationship between ICT skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State

Change Statistics										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
	.279	.756	.755	.454	.756	25.366	2	139	.000	.485

The result presented in Table 2 shows the relationship between ICT skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State with a coefficient of .75.6. This means that there was a high and positive relationship between the ICT skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State. The coefficient of determination associated with the correlation coefficient of 0.75.6 is 0.75.5. The coefficient of determination shows that 75.6%

of sustainable economic development is attributed to ICT skills possessed by business education students. This is an indication that 24.4% of sustainable economic development is attributed to other variables outside ICT skills possessed by business education students.

Research question two

What is the relationship between managerial skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State?

Table 3

The relationship between managerial skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State

Change Statistics										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
	.246	.891	.886	.809	.891	61.466	2	139	.000	.484

The result presented in Table 3 shows the relationship between the managerial skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State with a coefficient of 0.89.1. This means that there was a high and positive relationship between the managerial skills possessed by business education students and sustainable economic development of Cross River State. The coefficient of determination associated with the correlation coefficient of 0.89.1 is 0.88.6. The coefficient of determination shows that 89.1% of sustainable economic development is attributed

to the managerial skills possessed by business education students. This is an indication that 10.9% of sustainable economic development is attributed to other variables, than the managerial skills possessed by business education students.

Hypotheses testing

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between ICT skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State.



Table 4

Simple Linear Regression analysis of the relationship between ICT skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State

Source of variation	SS	df	MS	F-ratio	Sig.
Regression	675.27	2	337.635	61.466	.000
Residual	763.55	139	5.493		
Total	1438.82	141			

$\alpha = 0.05, S = \text{Significant}$

The result in Table 4 shows the regression analysis on relationship between ICT skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State. Result shows that an F-ratio of 61.466 with associated or exact probability value of 0.00 was obtained. This exact probability value of 0.00 was less than 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between ICT skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development

of Cross River State was therefore rejected. Inference drawn is that, there is a significant relationship between ICT skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State.

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between managerial skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State.

Table 5

Simple Linear Regression analysis of the relationship between managerial skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State

Source of variation	SS	df	MS	F-ratio	Sig.
Regression	699.57	2	349.785	65.774	.000
Residual	739.25	139	5.318		
Total	1438.82	141			

$\alpha = 0.05, S = \text{Significant}$

The result in Table 5 shows the regression analysis for the relationship between managerial skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State. Result shows that an F-ratio of 65.774 with associated or exact probability value of 0.00 was obtained. This exact probability value of 0.00 was less than 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between managerial skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions and sustainable economic development of Cross River State was therefore rejected. Inference drawn is that, managerial skills possessed by business education students in tertiary institutions significantly relates to sustainable economic development of Cross River State.

III. Discussion of findings ICT skills and sustainable economic development

Finding from hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant relationship between ICT skills possessed by business education students at public universities and the sustainable economic development of Cross River State. This implies that business education students who possess ICT skills contribute significantly to sustainable economic development. This finding is in line with the empirical findings of [15] that investigated how the acceleration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has influenced human development in 49 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. This analysis focuses on key ICT factors, including mobile phone adoption, telephone access, and internet penetration per 100 inhabitants from 2000-2012. The research findings revealed a



significant correlation between the sustainable development agenda, goals, and policies crafted to promote ICT growth and utilization, especially in the context of mobile phones, telephones, and internet access. The findings are again supported by the study of [16] who used a panel VAR model to examine the relationship between ICT development and four other economic indicators for G-20 countries between 1991 and 2012. The study found a positive correlation between the expansion of ICT infrastructure and economic growth. Additionally, the study establishes long-term causal links among these variables.

Similarly, This finding also agrees with the findings of [17] who observed that many students often divert their attention to various computer-related activities instead of prioritizing their academic work. This tendency may be attributed to most students' belief that ICT tools facilitate their learning, possibly due to the convenience and accessibility they provide. Still in support of this finding, [8] also found that ICT skills are essential skills for attainment of sustainable economic development, but the level of ICT skills possessed by Business Education graduating students in Universities in South-South Nigeria was quite low. Therefore, there is a need to invest more in inculcating relevant ICT skills in business education students in order to boost their capacity to serve as the most essential resources for stimulating sustainable economic development.

Managerial skills and sustainable economic development

Finding from hypothesis two revealed that managerial skills possessed by business education students at public universities significantly relate to sustainable economic development in Cross River State . This finding is in consonance with the findings of [22] on managerial skills considered necessary for the success of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in curbing social vices. It was confirmed that these managerial skills are highly important for the success of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in combating social vices, with no significant impact from the manager's years of experience. Similarly, [23] ascertained the personal, managerial, and problem solving skills needed by Business Education postgraduate students for entrepreneurial development. The study identified key skills needed by business education undergraduate students for entrepreneurial development, including communication skills, empathy, decision making, critical thinking, flexibility, and stress

management. All these skills are essential managerial skills needed for successful development of entrepreneurial businesses that serves as major tools for achieving sustainable economic development in the 21st century. The finding was supported further by [6], who assessed the self-employment skills required by business education students in Nigeria's South-Western Colleges of Education for national development. The study acknowledged that Business Education students should possess crucial abilities such as effective time management and self-motivation skills for self-employment and national development. Therefore, the possession of a set of these managerial skills is considered vital in establishing, developing, and optimizing the divergent benefits of entrepreneurial ventures for sustainable economic development.

IV. Conclusion

The study concluded that a significant relationship exists between ICT skills and managerial skills possessed by Business Education students at public universities for the sustainable economic development of Cross River State. This implies that the identified self-employability skills possessed by business education students play pivotal roles in the sustainable economic development of Cross River State and Nigeria at large. Self-employability skills possessed by Business Education students can go a long way toward reducing the level of unemployment, hardship, and poverty faced by many Nigerian graduates today, by creating gainful self-employment and job opportunities for others. Given the large number of graduates that Business Education schools and departments produces each year for the job market, if the programme is strengthened to adequately equip its recipients with self-employability skills upon graduation, this can have a multiplier effect on starting and effectively managing their own businesses. That can also lead to creating employment opportunities to help reduce the high rate of unemployment and poverty index in modern society, and provide a socioeconomic facelift to themselves, their families, communities and the nation at large. Putting all these together would definitely culminate in the sustainable economic development of the country.

V. Recommendations

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



1. Government and major education stakeholders should make concerted efforts to equip Business Education resource rooms and lecture theatres with state-of-the-art ICT facilities, in good quantity and quality with strong internet connectivity to enhance skill-oriented teaching-learning and practice for the acquisition of self-employability skills by business education students.
2. Business educators should always engage students with practically challenging business management activities or scenarios that will help them develop and improve their managerial skills, and they should be made to consecutively role-play manager's responsibility in order to gain mastery of the training to acquire managerial skills for self-employability leading to sustainable development.

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