

MANAGERIAL COMPETENCIES REQUIRED BY UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF BUSINESS EDUCATION FOR PROFICIENCY IN BUSINESS ORGANIZATION

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To cite this article (APA): Alhaji, M. M., Inuwa, U., & Ibrahim, A. (2024). Managerial competencies required by undergraduate students of business education for proficiency in business organizations. *AAU Journal of Business Educators*, 4(1), 423-432

Abstract

*This study investigated managerial competencies required by Business Education Students for proficiency in business organization in Bauchi State, Nigeria. The study is guided by three specific objectives and three research questions, the study employed a descriptive survey design. The population comprises 1,734 registered business organizations in Bauchi State, with a sample size of 300 determined using G*Power. 300 randomly selected top management of business organizations were contacted to gather data using the Managerial Competencies Required for Proficiency in Business Organization Questionnaire. Data collected was analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and Pearson Product Moment Correlation through SPSS version 25. Findings revealed that problem solving, decision making, and strategic competencies are highly required by undergraduate business education students for proficiency in business organization in Bauchi state, Nigeria and they are strongly related to proficiency require by undergraduate Business Education students in business organization in Bauchi state, Nigeria. Hence, these competencies are essential in shaping educational programs that prepare students for success in the dynamic and competitive business environment of Bauchi State. This study therefore, recommended the integration of competency-based curricula, providing continuous professional development for lecturers delivering Business Education courses and strengthen partnerships between academic institutions and businesses in Bauchi State to offer students meaningful internship opportunities.*

Keywords: problem solving, decision making, strategic competencies, proficiency in business organization.

Introduction

Business education is an academic discipline that equip individuals with the necessary skills, competencies, and attitudes essential for navigating the complexities of the modern eco-social system. Its significance lies not only in preparing students for initial employment but also in fostering their continuous advancement within the business-related sectors (Pothier & Condon, 2020). In Bauchi State, business education is a major aspect of vocational training. It is an essential catalyst for economic growth and development, empowering individuals with the capacity to adapt to personal and employment situations while contributing to socio-economic progress (Amoor & Udoh, 2018).

The scope of business education in Bauchi State mirrors global trends, emphasizing foundational processes which encompasses educational training, decision making, management philosophy, and practical applications (Pothier & Condon, 2020). However, despite the comprehensive nature of business education programmes, graduates often encounter challenges in effectively translating their skills into organizational proficiency within modern business environments (Nnabude, 2019; Hills & Morris, 2018). These challenges stem from a disconnect between the competencies imparted by traditional business education programmes and the evolving demands of contemporary business organizations. Graduates find themselves ill-equipped with the skills to meet the diverse managerial competencies required in today's dynamic workplace settings (Okolie *et al.*, 2021; Okoro, 2015). This gap does not only undermine the employability of business education

graduates but also exacerbates the issue of unemployment, underemployment and poverty particularly in Bauchi State (Muhammad & Inuwa, 2023).

Recognizing the pivotal role of managerial competencies in organizational success, this study seeks to address this gap by examining the specific competencies required by undergraduate students of business education for proficiency in business organizations in Bauchi state. While existing literature has explored various managerial competencies essential for organizational management, there remains a notable dearth of research focusing specifically on the preparedness of Business Education students in Bauchi State for the demands of modern business organizations.

This study aims to fill this identified gap by delving into competencies such as problem-solving, decision-making, and strategic thinking which are critical for navigating the intricacies of contemporary organizational landscapes (Mbadugha & Eze, 2021; Hawi *et al.*, 2015). By shedding light on the alignment between the competencies imparted by business education programmes and the requirements of modern business organizations, the findings of this present research will help to inform curriculum development initiatives and educational policies aimed at enhancing the relevance and effectiveness of business education in Bauchi state, which ultimately and potentially fosters the employability and success of graduates in the world of business.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine the managerial competencies required by Business Education students for proficiency in business organization in Bauchi State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to examine:

1. the extent to which undergraduate students of Business Education require problem-solving competencies for proficiency in business organizations in Bauchi state, Nigeria.
2. the extent to which undergraduate students of Business Education require decision-making competencies for proficiency in business organizations in Bauchi state, Nigeria.
3. the extent to which undergraduate students of Business Education require strategic competencies for proficiency in business organization in Bauchi state, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following question are formulated:

Research Question 1: What are the problem solving competencies required by undergraduate students of Business Education for proficiency in business organizations in Bauchi state, Nigeria?

Research Question 2: What are the decision making competencies required by undergraduate students of Business Education for proficiency in business organizations in Bauchi state, Nigeria?

Research Question 3: What are the strategic competencies required by undergraduate students of Business Education for proficiency in business organizations in Bauchi state, Nigeria?

Literature Review

Concept of Managerial Competencies

Competencies are indispensable qualities that distinguish performance competencies in general. In recent years, many research has contributed to the discourse surrounding leadership competencies, resulting in various perspectives on the definition of competencies within the literature. Despite this contribution, a unified definition remains elusive. Competency can be understood as the capacity to apply knowledge, behaviours, personal attributes, capabilities, and skills to carry out essential tasks or functions within a specified role (Shet, Patil & Chandawarkar, 2017). Boyatzis (2012) described competencies as essential characteristics encompassing motives, traits, skills, aspects of self-image or social role, or bodies of knowledge utilized by individuals. Dubois (2013) posited that competencies involves the ability to apply knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviours, and personal characteristics to effectively perform critical tasks or functions within a given role. Quinn, Faerman, Thompson, and McGrath (2016) further emphasize the importance of competencies in recognizing the link between and among skills, knowledge, personal characteristics, and task performance. Wynne and Stringer (2017) define it as encompassing what individuals

need to be, know, and do to achieve job-related outputs. Lucia and Lepsinger (2019) argued that competencies serve as significant predictors of job performance and success, equivalent to academic aptitude and knowledge. Bartram (2015) saw competencies as sets of behaviours instrumental in achieving desired results. Crawford (2013) defined competencies as the combination of knowledge, skills, and personal characteristics yielding outstanding results.

In organizational literature, managers' competencies encompass organizational, individual, core, personal, and managerial aspects (Abraham *et al.*, 2013). These competencies are integral part of organizational values and are essential for matching workforce and managerial demands with the organization's core competencies (Pickett, 2018). It is crucial for managers to develop these skills early in their careers as they are directly proportional to career advancement and are primarily acquired through on-the-job experience rather than formal education (Hofener, 2016).

There is an ongoing debate regarding the distinction between skills and competencies. While skills typically refer to overt behavioural abilities for routine tasks, competencies encompass cognitive abilities for non-routine tasks (Kanungo & Misra, 2019). Although, they are distinct, managerial competencies encompassing both skills and competencies, with competencies illustrating managers' fundamental characteristics and potentials for success (Kanungo & Misra, 2019). However, the distinction between skills and competencies is not always a clear-cut, as managerial skills often overlap with competencies (McKenna, 2014).

Managerial competencies encompass various aspects such as team leadership, problem-solving, strategic planning, and client focus (Hawi, Alkhodary & Hashem, 2015). Competencies, such as knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and behaviours, are essential for achieving desired performance levels (Morris, 2018). They are described as crucial for successful job performance contributing to high-quality task accomplishment and encompassing abilities, intellectual capacities, and attitudes.

Recently, the terms "professional" and "generic" have been used to describe competencies, with the former being job-specific and the latter covering behavioural or social competencies applicable across various professions (Kanungo & Misra, 2019). Generic competencies are critical for success across different job types and contexts and are therefore more easily transferable (Hofener, 2016). Skills are crucial for operating a business successfully and are typically acquired through training or experience (Okolie *et al.*, 2021). They enable business education students to start and market their enterprises, making them self-reliant and relevant to society. Competencies play a vital role in both the workplace and tertiary education, bridging the gap between organizational demands and traditional education (Pickett, 2018). Employers consider a combination of knowledge, skills, personal traits, and values during recruitment, with generic competencies often prioritized (Quinn *et al.*, 2016).

Problem Solving Competencies

People at professional or non-professional level are often involved in daily decision making, whether for simple or complicated problems, thus involving employees in problem solving and decision making will affect their creativity and awareness level. Decision making is the process for taking and deciding something serious. Employers employ people who are capable for determining the problems and making effective decisions for problems solving. Problem solving is a process in which a gap between a present situation and a desired goal (Hawi *et al.*, 2015). This competency is a logical approach (Bowman, 2013) when implementing steps starting from defining the problem to taking the right decision. There are two approaches for Problem solving decisions making. The first approach depends on the logical approach such as the analysis and the evaluation between the alternatives, and this approach is laying on the information credibility, knowledge and the analysis methods. The second approach involves the intuition decision which is depending on the person's experience and the circumstance the person experts by doing shortcuts for some steps (Tat, Hooi, Rasli, Chin & Yusoff, 2014).

Decision Making Competencies

Decision making is a selection process where one of two or more possible solutions is chosen to reach a desired goal depending on experience and knowledge to choose the best alternative for reaching objectives and the consistency decisions among the managerial levels. The steps in problem solving and

decision making are quite similar, being more important depending on the persons' managerial level, since whenever the managerial level become higher the competency need to be enhanced deeper (Neda, Khairuddin, Jegak & Azimi, 2011). Decision making competence as an ability, capacity, or faculty to make considered and effective decisions, come to sensible conclusions, perceived and distinguish relationships, understand situations and form objective opinions especially in matters that affect action (Priem & Swink, 2004). Studies in the field of decision making examined the processes underlying choice behavior, and aim to help people make decisions and adapt strategies that better fit the task at hand. Traditionally, these studies were mainly centered on aggregated behavior that reflected systematic biases and deviations from the normative benchmark (Ariely, 2018). Although these studies provide valuable insights into the situational factors affecting the quality of decision making in general, it remains unclear how decision-making quality influence value creation (Franken & Muris, 2015). Ample work has shown that individual quality of decision making have pronounced effects on choice behaviour for value creation (Yechiam et al., 2015), risk perception (Franken & Muris, 2005), risk seeking and avoidance (Ariely, 2008) and binary guessing (Lauriola *et al.*, 2014). The philosophy behind business education represent the cornerstone of the value creation process, regardless of whether this value creation occurs in the economic, social, or environmental domain. Therefore, a detailed operational description of the core elements that constitute this mindset is critical for improving the quality of business education students and their potential to create value. Bacigalupo *et al.*, (2016) theoretical framework, which identifies three main competency areas that constitute the business education mindset; The first element is judgment. Priem and Swink (2014) refers to "pure entrepreneurial judgment" for the early discovery of opportunities in markets where consumer needs are constantly changing. These needs may be explicit or latent, and consumers are sometimes unaware of their real needs. A business education student is the figure who must imagine and design a value proposition to meet these needs. This "entrepreneurial alertness" which represent how to spot new opportunities has been defined as the general process whereby overt or latent consumer or market demands indicate to business education students' prospects for opportunity creation or discovery. As Penrose affirms, business education students can discovery is a product from their imagination that required creativity and knowledge.

Strategic Competencies

A strategic competency is linked to an organizational mission and it is highly implemented at the managerial level. It is the approach that is predicting and determining the weakness and the strongest aspects in both internal and external environment, such as SWOT analysis to evaluate the strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This competency identifying the internal and the external factors are favourable or unfavourable to achieve organizational objectives. Managers are to focus on the organizational resources and make sure that all their employees are working towards achieving the planned objectives. It is a competency that continuously operate and consist a methodological term (Hawi *et al.*, 2015). Sparrow and Hodgkinson (2016) argued that strategic competencies involve the ability and efforts that are taken to seeks information for organizations mission and objective especially business environment towards competitors, to lead rather than follow them, create a dynamic environment, consult the technical levels for right decision making, and to have a cognitive and the ability to direct organization strength to response directly for an emergency situation.

Method

Research Design

A descriptive survey research design was used to examine the level of managerial competencies required by Business Education students for proficiency in business organizations in Bauchi State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research method is used when a researcher is interested in studying the opinions, feelings, and thoughts of the respondents about a particular situation (Nannim, 2018). This method enables the researchers to collect and analyze quantitative data. Therefore, a descriptive survey research design is appropriate for achieving the objective of this study.

Population and Sampling Procedure

The population of this study comprised 1,734 top management staff from all registered business organizations operating in Bauchi state (SMEDAN Gazette, 2022). Top management staff of each of these

organizations were contacted to collect data on managerial competencies required by Business Education students for proficiency in business organizations. This assertion is in line with the suggestion of Ezenwafor and Olaniyi (2018) and Onwuchekwa *et al.*, (2017) that top management staff of business organizations from their wealth of experience are information-rich to ascertain the required managerial competencies for proficiency in business organizations. The sample size for this study consists of 262 top management staff from all the registered business organizations operating in Bauchi States, Nigeria. The sample was statistically determined using GPower, a statistical tool used for determining the appropriate minimum sample size required for a study. A simple random sampling technique was used in the study because this sampling technique is believed to produce samples which are free from bias (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Measurement Scales

The variables of this study were measured using a measurement scale, titled: Managerial Competencies Required for Proficiency in Business Organization Questionnaire. The measurement scales were adapted from existing studies. For instance, problem-solving competencies consisted of 8 items was adapted from the work of Mind (2021), Decision-Making Competencies with 10 items was adapted from the work of Mind (2021) and Strategic competencies with 11 items was adapted from the work of Okoye (2018). A five-point Likert type scale was used in this study is as follows: Very Highly Required (VHR=5), Highly Required (HR=4), Required (R=3), Fairly required (FR=2), Not Required (NR=1).

Measurement Scales Reliability

To ensure the reliability of the measurement scales, a pilot test was conducted with 40 top management staff of business organizations in Gombe state. Because the state is outside the study area but the respondents have similar characteristics with the sample of this study. The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability coefficients of the three variables are; Problem solving competencies (0.81), Decision making competencies (0.86) and Strategic competencies (0.93). The coefficient values obtained suggest that the instrument is reliable based on the recommendation made by Hair *et al.*, (2017).

Data Analysis

Data collected from the respondents were analyzed using mean and standard deviation statistics. The decision rule was based on any mean scores equal to or greater than 2.50 was regarded as very highly required, while any mean scores less than 2.50 was regarded as not required. Also, any standard deviation value between .00 and .96 indicated that student's responses were very close.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the problem solving competencies required by undergraduate students of Business Education for proficiency in business organizations in Bauchi state, Nigeria?

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the level of problem-solving competencies required by undergraduate students of Business Education for proficiency in business organizations.

S/N	Items	N	M	SD	Remark
1	Choose solution from different alternatives to solve problem.	274	3.60	1.210	HR
2	After solution has been implemented, look for ways to improve the idea to avoid future problems	274	3.65	1.187	HR
3	Strive to look problems from different perspectives and generate multiple solutions.	274	3.70	1.222	HR
4	Evaluate potential solutions carefully against a predefined standard.	274	3.76	1.148	HR
5	Systematically search for issues that may become problems in the future as potential values.	274	3.71	1.142	HR

6	Ask oneself lots of different questions about the nature of organization problem.	274	3.86	1.168	HR
7	Explores potential solutions in organization.	274	3.78	1.178	HR
8	Analyse the information needed to find solution to a problem that needs to be solved in organization.	274	3.91	1.121	HR
Grand Mean			3.75	.926	HR

Note. N= Number of Respondents, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, HR= Highly Required

Table 1 revealed that the mean score of respondents in all the items of the variable (problem-solving competencies) are greater than 3.00. The mean scores of problem solving competencies items ranged from 3.60 to 3.91. The grand mean of problem solving competencies is 3.75 with a standard deviation value of .926. This suggested that undergraduate students of Business Education highly required problem-solving competencies for proficiency in business organizations in Bauchi state, Nigeria.

Research Question 2: What are the decision making competencies required by undergraduate students of Business Education for proficiency in business organizations in Bauchi state, Nigeria?

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of the level of decision making competencies required by undergraduate students of Business Education for proficiency in business organizations.

S/N	Items	N	M	SD	Remark
1	Evaluate the risks associated with each alternative before making decision.	274	3.86	.168	HR
2	Try to determine the real issue before starting a decision-making process.	274	3.78	.178	HR
3	Use a well-defined process to structure decisions.	274	3.91	.121	HR
4	Go back and recheck assumptions and process when I have doubts about decision.	274	3.86	.168	HR
5	Take the time needed to choose the best decision-making tool for each specific decision.	274	3.78	.178	HR
6	Consider a variety of potential solutions before making decision.	274	3.91	.121	HR
7	Communicate decision with its implementation plan.	274	3.86	.168	HR
8	Communicate decision with the rationale for each decision.	274	3.78	.178	HR
9	Evaluate choices based on factors most important for the decision-making process.	274	3.91	.121	HR
10	Make timely and well-informed decisions.	274	3.86	.168	HR
Grand Mean			3.85	.045	HR

Note. N= Number of Respondents, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, HR= Highly Required

Table 2 showed that all the items of the variable (decision making competencies) have a mean score of not less than 3.00. The mean scores of decision making competencies items ranged from 3.78 to 3.91. The grand mean of decision making competencies was 3.85 with a standard deviation value of .045 This implied that undergraduate students of Business Education highly required decision making competencies for proficiency in business organizations in Bauchi state, Nigeria.

Research Question 3: What are the strategic competencies required by undergraduate students of Business Education for proficiency in business organizations in Bauchi state, Nigeria?

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the level of strategic competencies required by undergraduate students of Business Education for proficiency in business organizations.

S/N	Items	N	M	SD	Remark
1	Contribute to the development of strategic plans for the organization.	274	3.84	.959	HR
2	Setting clear strategic objectives for the team.	274	3.85	.998	HR
3	Analyse complex data to inform strategic decision-making.	274	3.85	.947	HR
4	Identify key trends that impact the organization's strategic position.	274	3.88	.874	HR
5	Effectiveness in translating strategic plans into actionable steps for the team.	274	3.83	.976	HR
6	Ensure alignment between day-to-day activities and the organization's strategic goals.	274	3.94	.927	HR
7	Manage potential risks associated with strategic initiatives.	274	3.86	.929	HR
8	Balance calculated risks with strategic goals for the organization.	274	3.90	.915	HR
9	Encourage innovative thinking within the team.	274	3.91	.908	HR
10	Incorporate creative solutions into the development of strategic plans.	274	3.94	.882	HR
11	Build and maintain strategic relationships with external partners and collaborators.	274	3.86	.168	HR
	Grand Mean		3.88	.731	HR

Note. N= Number of Respondents, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation, HR= Highly Required

Table 3 indicated that all the items of the variable (strategic competencies) have a mean score of not less than 3.00. The mean scores of strategic competencies items ranged from 3.83 to 3.94. The variable also had a grand mean of 3.88 with a standard deviation value of .731. The result indicated that strategic competencies are highly required by undergraduate students of business education for proficiency in business organizations in Bauchi state, Nigeria.

Discussion

The findings from research question 1 shed light on the level of problem-solving competencies required by undergraduate students of business education for proficiency in business organizations. This aligns with a study conducted by Sparrow and Hodgkinson (2016) who found that business education graduates required problem solving competencies to a very high extent for job performance. Similarly, a study conducted by Ezenwafor and Olaniyi (2018) found that business education graduates highly needed problem-solving competencies for entrepreneurial development and sustenance in South-West Nigeria, which is consistent with the finding of the present study.

The findings from research question 2 showed the level of decision-making competencies required by undergraduate students of business education for proficiency in business organizations. This aligns with a substantial body of literature that recognizes decision-making as a critical skill in the business domain and beyond. For example, a study conducted by Budi, Rizqi and Shet et al. (2017) revealed that guidance and counseling students required decision-making competencies to a very high extent for industrial revolution era. Similar findings was reported in the study of Onwuchekwa, Ejike and Mbemena (2017) who found that Entrepreneurs highly required decision-making competencies for promoting entrepreneurship in Anambra

State. The existing studies are not consistent with the current study because the existing studies did not focus on undergraduate students of business education and they conducted their studies in different geographical area unlike the current study that was conducted in North-Eastern Nigeria.

The results obtained from research question 3 provided evidence that undergraduate students of business education highly required strategic competencies for proficiency in business organizations. This finding aligns with existing literature who emphasized the growing importance of strategic competencies in the rapidly evolving business landscape. For instance, a study conducted by Akeke *et al.*, (2022) proved that strategic competencies are considered fundamental skills for leaders and professionals, enabling them to navigate complexity, anticipate challenges, and seize opportunities. The strong and positive relationship between strategic competencies and proficiency aligns with the findings of Ogundele (2022) who found that strategic competencies is an importance strategic capabilities in achieving and sustaining a competitive advantage.

Conclusion

This study examined the level of managerial competencies required for undergraduate students of Business Education for proficiency in business organizations in Bauchi State, Nigeria. The study empirically proved that team leadership, problem solving, decision making, strategic and customer focus competencies are highly required by undergraduate students of Business Education for proficiency in business organizations in Bauchi state, Nigeria. The identified competencies served as a roadmap for all relevant stakeholders in both academia and business domain to collaboratively nurture well-rounded and proficient graduates who are better equipped with core competencies to meet the requirements of the local business landscape in Bauchi State, Nigeria. As such, these managerial competencies are essential in shaping educational programmes that prepare students for success in a dynamic and competitive business world in Bauchi State.

Recommendations

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

1. Academic institutions offering Business Education programmes should endeavour to consider the adoption of a competency-based curriculum. This type of curriculum should emphasize the development of key competencies identified in this study, which include problem-solving, decision-making, and strategic competencies.
2. Lecturers responsible for delivering of Business Education courses should undergo continuous professional development to stay abreast of the evolving business landscape. This will enable them to effectively impart the necessary managerial competencies on students. Workshops, seminars, and collaborative initiatives with industry practitioners can facilitate knowledge exchange and ensure that educators are well-equipped to nurture the identified competencies.
3. Academic institutions should endeavour to establish and strengthen partnerships with businesses and industries in Bauchi State to provide students with meaningful internship opportunities. Exposure to real-world business scenario will allow students to apply and enhance their competencies in a practical setting. This collaborative strategy will also facilitate a two-way exchange of knowledge between academia and industry, ensuring that educational programmes remain relevant and responsive to industry needs.

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