

DISSONANCE IN EMPLOYABILITY SOCIAL SKILLS OF SOCIAL STUDIES UNDERGRADUATES AND THE WORLD OF WORK IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the level of employability social skills of undergraduates in Nigeria using Social Studies undergraduates in the Delta State University, Abraka as a case study. Qualitative research design with simple random sampling technique was employed for the study. The population of the study comprised of the two hundred and thirty-two (232) undergraduate Social Studies students of 200 to 400 levels, from which a sample size of fifty (50) students was drawn. Unstructured questions and in depth interview was the methods of data collection, while the researcher was the instrument for data collection; data collection and analysis were done concurrently. Findings of the study revealed that Social Studies undergraduates of Delta State University have a good level of few social employability social skills such as communication skills and empathy skills. However, the findings also showed that participants do not possess critical employability social skills such as interpersonal, problem solving, conflict resolution and creative survival skills which are needed to survive in a working environment. The findings in this study also have implications for all

undergraduates of other disciplines in Nigerian universities. The study therefore recommended that school curriculum at the university level should be developed to imbibe social skills into undergraduates to make them employable, for them to be able to develop a career for themselves.

Keywords: Dissonance; Undergraduates; Social Skills; Employability; Social Studies

Introduction

The significance of gainful employment for the individual and the society can never be overemphasized, therefore the rising rate of unemployment in Nigeria and around the world poses a serious challenge for present day youths. Unemployment has become a national emergency and a socio-political problem in Nigeria. According to the Nigeria's National Bureau of statistics, the unemployment rate in the first half of 2020 stood at 27.1 percent (Trading Economics 2021). The unemployment rate is on a geometric progression because as young Nigerians transit through various levels and forms of education into the world of work, they are increasingly faced with the hurdles of becoming gainfully employed and developing their career life after school. Experience has shown that a huge number of undergraduates in Nigeria lack pre-requisite social skills needed to explore issues, opportunities and people. Ejoh (2020) revealed that the rise in unemployment rate in Nigeria is worsened by lack of appropriate skills. Similarly, the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2017) asserted that high level of education with no corresponding skills is the leading cause of unemployment among youths.

Yigit (2008) affirmed that many individuals do not possess suitable social skills that are vital to interaction and relationship among individuals. Insufficient Social Skills can lead to negative results such as aggression, misunderstanding, rancour, bad blood and unemployment. The high level of unemployment and

underemployment is a pointer to the low level of skills possessed by young individuals to become employable upon graduation (Okoye & Edokpolor, 2021). To surmount this precarious situation, there is a need to strengthen the link between these skills and the workplace to support the development of employability skills among undergraduates. From personal observation many of the young graduates from Nigerian higher institutions of learning are deficient in social skills, they may have cognitive knowledge but lack the skills of acting out this knowledge, because the school, home and the society are not providing the needed practical experience. For instance, many parents' shutdown their wards when trying to express their views, while decisions are forced on them without giving the young people explanations as to why those decisions were taken. Lecturers are equally bossy; they oppress, abuse student's rights and even disrespect their students who dare not challenge them. So how do we now expect this same set of young people with an oppressive, battered, abusive and shutdown childhood experience to display social skills and etiquettes of emotional capacity, politeness, cooperation and honesty?

Subsequently, it is a glaring fact that there is crisis in global learning and our young people are not being prepared well enough for the labour market and work place of the 21st century (Education for All (EFA) (2012). This global crisis in learning has affected how undergraduates acquire social skills which are essential for survival in the work place. Kwok (2003) affirmed that there is an urgent need for higher institutions to continuously update the social skills of students, as a result of the rapid changes in the economy and the labour market. Abelha et tal (2020) also substantiated the necessity of developing employability and competence skills of undergraduates. The study highlighted the role of higher institutions of learning in promoting these skills and recommended that higher educational institutions should show serious concerns about upgrading the level of employability social skills of their graduating students. Due to this gap in social skills, there exist the need to ascertain the level of employability social skills

possessed by undergraduates in Nigeria in order to assist them in the generation and sustainability of employment.

Problem Statement

The high global rates of unemployment have escalated and exposed the vulnerability of youths to job crisis, unemployment, inequalities in the labour market, poor transition from school to work and high insulation from the labour market (Cavero & Ruiz, 2016). We are in a difficult period in the global labour market and graduates of Social Studies are not exempted. They need social skills to stand above their peers in the world of work, but unfortunately these skills, majority of undergraduates do not possess. Although Social Studies is supposed to help prepare its undergraduates with social skills, Social Studies undergraduates come out of tertiary educational institutions without imbibing these skills. This has created relationship problems and employability status, thereby making it difficult for companies and businesses most especially those of the private sectors to employ and keep them. Furthermore, it has resulted in a huge number of Social Studies graduates and graduates from other disciplines becoming unemployable in a modern world that is continually expanding in social interactions and building relationships across the globe. In addition, Gresham, Cook, Crew and Kern (2004) reported that measuring the extent of social skills acquired by people through learning have recorded little or no studies and literature; in Nigeria, such studies are non-existent. Therefore, the study investigated the extent of employability social skills possessed by Social Studies undergraduates of Delta State University, Abraka.

Literature Review

Social Skills

Norozy and Beheshtifar (2013) portrayed social skills as the ability to interact effectively with others, social skills express those attitudes, behaviours

considered as norms, accepted and expected in a civilized setting. Cubukcu (2018) pointed out that social skills are those invisible skills needed by people to become successful in their chosen careers and businesses, these skills are important in career success because they are needed to get along with other people. Chubukcu identified examples of social skills which can make people employable to include skills of empathy, listening, staying positive, cooperation skills and more. Social Skills are indeed crucial during the hiring process as it shows the capacity of the applicant in achieving business targets through good relationship with other people. It will also demonstrate how fit and effective the applicant will be able to display company culture and quality. Examples of social skills are interpersonal and effective communication skills, problem solving skills, conflict resolution, empathy, listening, cooperation and survival skills. Others are relationship management, respect /curtsey and understanding skills.

Gokmen and Omer (2017) pointed out that social interactions are vital to the working life of a person. Possessing good social skills will contribute to quality lifestyles of individuals and society, by making it possible for them to express themselves and understand each other thereby making them employable. Furthermore, as university graduates leave their families and immediate environments to new places in the course of their lives, social skills are significantly required to change their behaviour, perception and thinking. In as much as they will meet new people, social skills will help them to cope and survive. Therefore, equipping undergraduates with social skills through educational pedagogy will assist them in forming new alliances, building and sustaining successful careers as well as maintaining good professional relationships. Thus social skills are critical and profitable to people's careers by widening their network of interactions and relationships, thereby creating new ideas and better opportunities.

Social Studies and Social Skills

Social Studies as a course of study is committed to the analysis of human associations and interactions among individuals who live within societies (Obro, 2021). Social Studies involves studying human beings in various ways through understanding how they relate with their environments to how the society as a whole function. Social Studies is an indispensable aspect of modern day education and it is connected to all aspects of life. Jekayinfa (2017) described Social Studies as an intellectual field of enterprise that studies humans in their social groups and called Social Studies “science of society”. This science can give a deeper analysis of what is responsible for societal problems and events to social skills, behaviour and competences that are needed by undergraduates in today’s modern world of work.

Social Studies also help to shape lives, impact society and explore how individuals behave, think or feel in different circumstances (Muritala, Isiaka & Yusuf, 2019), social studies is concern with human behaviour in its social and cultural form, they are concern with social connections of learning and the importance of social order to societies. Hence Social Studies is equal to the task of delivering plausible employability social skills to young people. Gokmen and Omer (2017) identified four categories of Social Skills that can be adopted from Social Studies, they include; survival skills, problem solving skills, peace skills of conflict resolution and interpersonal/communication skills.

Accordingly, equipping Social Studies undergraduates with employability social skills is of utmost necessity for their personal and career development, because it will build their attitude towards forming better alliances and relationships that can bring about a more meaningful, successful and a fulfilled life (Institute of Education Sciences (IES) 2013). These trainings can be done in groups using classroom/lecture room environments with well-planned Social Studies curriculum. Each course in a semester or session will be the focus of learning a new social skill, strategies such as role playing, lecture guided

instructions, skills modelling and others can be adopted. Practical trainings can also allow for proper communication and cooperation skills among course mates.

Interpersonal/Communication Skills

Indeed, Career Guide (2019) described interpersonal skills as skills which are utilized in communicating with people in the school, work organization or any social structure. They also referred to interpersonal skills as soft skills which can be in the form of verbal or non-verbal expression. Similarly, Canover (2015) put that interpersonal skills are essential in the work place and described the process of using them as socialization. Good interpersonal skills enable people to work with all kinds of humans and professionals such as colleagues, clients, friends, customers and managers. Doyle (2020) submitted that interpersonal and communication skills are top criteria that are used to evaluate prospective employees. Finally, interpersonal skills involve the ability to collaborate and work with others successfully, they include skills of empathy, skills of sharing ideas and the ability to start and sustain relationships.

Problem Solving Skills

Companies and organizations are constantly faced with problems and issues that need solving hence the chances of an individual with problem solving skills will be high at securing employment. Similarly, problem solving skills are needed by people to take responsibilities, decisions and the skills to discover original, rare and creative solutions to problems. Kapur (2020) succinctly discussed the essentiality of problem solving skills in providing solutions to personal and professional problems. Problem solving skills are viewed as very significant to increasing the accomplishment of tasks and the realization of company goals. Indeed Career Guide (2020) gave examples of key elements of problem solving skills to include skills of analysis, creativity, decision making, research and dependability. The ability of any employee to resolve problems,

meet challenges and identify practical solutions are all an expression of problem solving skills therefore undergraduates should be encouraged to build their capacity of becoming good problem solvers (Moursund,2007).

Conflict Resolution Skills

Conflict in any organization is normal and can also be a healthy development for future relationships and growth. According to Corner Canyon Counselling (n.d) conflict resolution skills are important in managing stress, emotions and behaviour. These are skills to remain calm when angry or feel hurt, respect differences, disappointments and resentments. Skills for handling and resolving conflicts. Conflict resolution skills is the ability to resolve differences, skills to say “I am sorry”, persuasive skills and approaches in resolving conflict. Oachesu (2016) said that since conflicts are inevitable in any organization irrespective of the type whether public or private, conflict resolution skills have become a necessary criterion to be considered at the point of hiring. Chika et al (2020) opined that conflict management skills strengthen healthy competition, bridges gap in communication and promotes team participation. The paper recommended that work organizations should train their employees to acquire conflict resolution skills, by implication, these skills should be looked for in prospective job seekers in any organization.

Survival Skills

The skill of survival means the ability to obey laid down rules and directions whether they are convenient or not, listening skills and skills of making informed decisions during critical situations. Talent Culture (2014) outlined the survival skills needed to be employable as feeling fit in an organization, ability to keep your boss off your back, strategic thinking and ability to take risks. Lownsborough, Gillian & Gallingson (2004) submit that survival skills are more important than knowledge when it comes to getting and keeping a job. Mertes

(2021) saw survival skills as the survival of the fittest skills, while Wagner (2014) noted that agility, adaptability and entrepreneurship are integral attributes of survival skills. The individual with survival skills is an individual who is curious, imaginative and look beyond his/her degree.

Research Procedure

The study employed qualitative research to investigate the level of employability social skills of the participants, qualitative research method was chosen because it gives deep meaning to peoples world of living and experiences. Simple random sampling was used to select a sample of fifty (50) students as participants' for the study, twenty-five (25) males and twenty-five (25) female students to give a balance of sex, while the researcher was the instrument of data collection. The permission of the departmental board of studies and that of the respondents were sought before the study was carried out. All participants voluntarily took part in the study and had the right to withdraw, the participants are in 200 to 400 level of their study and are between 18-24 years old. Methods of data collection were unstructured questions and in-depth interview. In order to be able to ascertain the level of social skills possessed by participants, the researcher personally assembled the fifty respondents together in a lecture hall. She educated them on the nature of the research and the need for honest and truthful responses during the interview as their responses will be treated as anonymous for the objective of the study to be achieved. Afterwards, they were all given their schedule for the study. The study took two weeks to be completed 5 students were interviewed daily with the exception of Saturdays and Sundays. Each interview lasted for 30 minutes, during the interview responses were taken down in the form of field notes and analysed thereafter. The researcher also made use of observation to observe the attitude and words of participants without their knowledge. Wait time was also given to the participants to think before responding to questions, in some cases questions need to be rephrased and

probing questions were also used. Written materials were also given to participants at some point to ascertain their problem solving skills. After each interview the researcher will summarize the information for each participant thereby making the process of data collection and analysis concurrent.

Results and Findings

Participants feedback through interviews gave answers to the research questions put forward for this study. Though a well-designed unstructured questions and in depth interview, the employability social skills of participants were determined

Research questions 1: Interpersonal and Communication Skills.

The interview started with the question, do you normally start a deep conversation with someone you had met for the first time? Twenty-one of them answered in the negative, in fact, nineteen claim to be weary of people they meet for the first time. When Participants were asked if they had collaborated with others by partnering in a team to achieve a goal? Field notes showed that each interviewee/participants tend to pause before answering this question. I think is because of how the question was put forward, therefore the researcher always allow for some wait time to enable participants think. At other times, the question was rephrased or participants were asked to give background information on any group or team work they have been involved in and how they performed, this question seem to delve into their experiences of cooperating with others.

During the interviews, respondent 26 reported, “I always had embarrassing situations with the people I have worked with before in group projects, I felt odd among them”. Partnering in a team seems to be a problem for almost 30 of participants, as they hardly get along in a group. However, the researcher noted that participants’ communication skills was high as their speech was effortlessly clear and very audible. Their sense of empathy was equally above

average but more than 50% of participants lack good cooperative, understanding and relationship skills. Few of the Students don't socialize on social media with their colleagues, this isn't good because being able to socialize with their course mates will build their interpersonal skills. Participant 32 dwelled on this aspect by saying: "yes, social media is good in building interpersonal relationships, it helps in knowing people and chatting with them give you an idea of meeting and relating with them appropriately". Every participant asked about using social networking think is a good thing in building social skills.

Research questions 2: Problem Solving Skills

After completing the fifty interviews, it was observed that almost all of participants reported poor problem solving skills because their ability to work on written materials given to them, display professional skills of finding solutions to problems was below average. Also skills of critical and deductive reasoning were fragmented, besides they could not approximate the merits and demerits of a potential action. Simple questions posed to them on how to solve certain problems were poorly attempted, only three participants could specifically indicate solutions to the questions asked to test the problem solving skills of the participants and these skills was discovered to have been developed while in secondary school.

Research questions3: what is the level of conflict resolution skills of Social Studies undergraduates of Delta State University?

After analyzing field notes, the researcher discovered that only fourteen out of fifty participants can understand conflicting materials and information without meeting someone. Less than twenty-five of participants are not confident nor have self-control over conflict situation when they occur. Similarly, the understanding of group behavior seems to be scanty, understanding group behavior is paramount to preventing and resolving conflicts. Thirteen

participants accepted that they could or have resolved conflict in their class before because of their exposure to how conflicts are normally resolved in their families. Participant 6 said, “I cannot manage stress, emotions or my behavior when am upset”. Many participants cannot handle disappointments nor resentments and these normally make them prone to conflict situations with other people and very few can be said to have conflict management skills.

During the interview of participant 44 reflected on his past school experience and opened up on how prone he was to anger and violence and how he was finding it difficult having cordial relationships with other students. He reported his frequent row with fellow students, friends and how it is affecting his academics, because he lacked the skills to manage his emotions, keep things straight and resolve conflicts when they occur. This young man admitted he was not sure, if he could work with a private firm because he may not last long in the organization due to his poor conflict management skills. Undergraduates students’ need to possess the skills and behaviors necessary to understand and resolve conflicts as conflicts are inevitable in any working environment.

Research questions4: what is the level of survival skills of Social Studies undergraduates of Delta State University?

Only twelve of the fifty participants seems ready to be able to carry out difficult and challenging tasks, participant 16 said, “I hate stressful situations and I easily crumble under duress”. Many participants seem to shy away from problematic issues that they can’t survive. Participant 6 reflected on different experiences she had with teacher’s project work she couldn’t do, had to abandon them and lost the marks obtainable for those project because she could not put up with the stress. Participant 45 said “I remember one instance when I had to use Wikipedia to copy and paste a whole assignment from the website because I saw the task to be difficult and couldn’t survive the course without doing so to pass the course. Participants 4 and 21 gave account of how they could not do

student's research on various topics because they lack resilient and surviving skills. Organization skills, strategic thinking and ability to take risks which are examples of survival skills recorded low effects by participants. Participants' responses to unstructured questions showed that the majority of them lack agility and adaptability skills which are core elements of survival skills. Students reported that not having survival skills were detrimental to their academic achievements most times, and often experienced within a semester or sometimes and entire session. By implication when these students graduate, their none possession of these skills will affect their chances of getting a job.

Discussion of Findings

The study presented the results from unstructured interviews of 50 students studying social studies in the Delta State University, Abraka Nigeria. Findings was presented in four parts, which correspond with the research questions for the study, it was observed that more than half of the participants have good empathy skills and can communicate well. Similarly, the findings showed that their skill of understanding group behaviour is high. These findings are in disagreement with Yigit, (2008) and EFA, (2012) who posited that many young individuals do not possess suitable social skills and that the crisis in global learning is responsible for the lack of social skills expressed by the youths. However, it is worthy to note that this disagreement only affects two of the skills that were studied.

In contrast, findings on other skills uncovered the fact that Social Studies undergraduates do not possess appreciable levels of inter-personal, problem solving, conflict resolution and survival skills. Other skills that they have low level of, are co-operational, deductive and critical thinking skills. These include their inability to identify a bad situation or ability to judge whether a situation can eventually go wrong. These findings are in conformity with Okoye & Edokpolor (2021), Yigit (2008), Kwok (2003), Cavero & Ruiz, (2016) and Goken & Omer,

(2017). These studies exposed the vulnerability of youths to job crisis and unemployment due to their non-possession of the requisite social skills needed to access gainful employment.

Thirdly, findings revealed that there was no significant levels of conflict resolution and survival skills among participants. Thus the study concluded by aligning with Obro (2021), Jekanyifa, (2017), Nisbelt, (2019) and Ejoh (2020) who maintained that the social studies is good in nurturing social skills because it helps to instil social behaviour and skills. Finally, participants stressed the need to provide them with good employability social skills through educational pedagogy. Hence this study recommended the following.

1. That the use of Social Studies through educational pedagogy is crucial in equipping undergraduates with social skills in order to harmonize the dissonance in social skills and the world of work.

2. Emphasis should be placed on acquisition of social skills such as interpersonal, problem solving, co-operational, conflict resolution skills and others during the educational training of undergraduates in Nigeria.

3. Social Studies lecturers should take the inculcation of social skills through Social Studies seriously for better employment opportunities.

- 4.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings in this research has implications for not only the participants in this study but for other groups in the society such as lecturers, curriculum designers, undergraduates in other disciplines and parents. The findings also have practical implications for social skills development by enumerating the employability social skills that can be developed in Nigerian Universities. The study will also make contributions to extant literature by connecting employability social skills development to social studies undergraduates in Nigeria. The findings of the study have provided the need for employability social skills to be developed in Nigeria.

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