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Gender, Age And Employability Skills Acquisition Among University Students In Imo State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT
The study was designed to determine the influence of gender and age on the employability skills acquisition of university students in Imo State. The design was the ex-post facto, and the sample was 618 final year students of 2013/2014 academic sessions. The instrument used was an adapted 40 items questionnaire titled Employability Skills Acquisition Questionnaire (ESAQ), with reliability estimates ranging from 0.68 to 0.82. Data was analysed using population t-test, independent t-test and ANOVA. The results revealed that the extent of employability skills acquisition among university students is significantly high; gender and age have significant influence on employability skills acquisition. Recommendations were made accordingly.
Keywords: employability skills, university students, gender, age

INTRODUCTION
Nigeria has been battling with the serious issue of graduate unemployment. Successive governments have introduced one programme or the other to curb this menace among the most productive segment of the population. Recently, with globalization and its attendant competitiveness in today's market place came the issue of graduate unemployability. In other words, even if government through social and economic re-engineering makes job available, this category of graduates will still remain unemployed, because they lack the necessary skills required in the workplaces, of course, this is the last thing a family would want to hear after spending limited resources to train a child in the university (Idaka, 2013).

It is commonly expected that university education once acquired should empower one with the right physical and intellectual skills to make one a useful member of the society who can contribute to national development (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004). Among others, one important expectation of a graduate is gainful employment either in the private or public sector. This underscores the importance of having employability skills on graduation.

Employability is a set of achievement skills, understandings and personal attitudes that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefit themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy (Weligamage, 2009). It can also be seen as that transferable skills needed by individuals to make them 'employable' (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Network, 2014).

From the stand point of employers of labour, employability skills refer to work-readiness, that is, possession of skills, knowledge, attitude and commercial understanding that will enable new graduates to make productive contributions to organizational objectives soon after commencing employment (Mason, 1999). Hence, two very important concerns of employers of labour today

are employing skilled workers and re-training them if need arises (Robinson, 2000). The difference between the skills needed on the job and those possessed by applicants often referred to as the "skills – gap", is therefore of real concern to human resources management and business owners who want to hire only competent employees.

Employability skills according to Wafaa (2011) include the following:- computer skills, communication skills, problem solving, teamwork, initiative and enterprise skills, planning and organization, self-management and decision-making. Computer skills simply being computer literate; communication skills are the ability to communicate in a clear and concise manner through written and spoken means. Problem solving skill is the ability to understand a problem by breaking it down into smaller parts, and identifying the key issues, implications and identifying solutions. Being a team player ensures working well with diverse staff in any establishment to accomplish a common task. Initiative and enterprise is the ability to think outside the box. That is, to be creative and innovative; planning and organization is the ability to develop action plans for assigned projects, plan and organize events and activities; Self-management is the ability to get on with work without someone checking up on one every five minutes. On the other hand, decision-making is the ability to make decisions on time, analyse decision, identify implications, weigh different options and assess long term effect.

Thus, young graduates should take keen interest in ensuring that they add value to their own worth by building their total selves in academics, character and other skills needed in the work place (Idaka, 2013). Incidentally, these skills are homologous to the generic skills which university graduates are expected to acquire on graduation. Of course, failure to acquire these work-readiness skills makes one unemployable, a situation that is worrisome and unacceptable. The consequence of having a mass of unemployable graduates is anyone's guess.

Commenting on the role of employability skills, Idaka (2013) opined that any country that loses competitiveness in this globalized world as a result of lack of employable skills stands the risk of having foreigners take up job positions meant for her citizens. In a related study, Uzoechi (2015), found that male students were better than their female counterparts in employability skills acquisition in terms of communication skills, planning and organization, self-management, decision making, computer skill and overall employability skills. However, female were better in terms of teamwork, problem solving, initiative and enterprise.

Conversely, Guardian (2013), reported no differences between male and female students in their employability skills in terms of all the sub-variables. On the variable of age, Asuquo and Agboola (2014) reported that young adults (20-45 years) were better in their acquisition of employability skills than older adults of above 45 years.

Similarly, Ibok (2013) found that age significantly influenced employability skills acquisition among secondary school students in Akwa Ibom State. On the contrary, Okwilagwe and Falaye (2010) found no age difference on the acquisition of employability skills.

In the literature, the importance of the acquisition of employability skills has been extolled, and in every day experience those who possessed these skills have always been preferred, particularly in the private sector. It is therefore germane to conduct a study like this present one, with the hope that, the findings would further provide scope and direction. The questions that this study intend to provide answers are: what is the level of employability skills acquisition among university students in Imo state? And is the level a function of gender and age?

To guide the study three hypotheses were formulated:

1. The level of employability skills acquisition (in terms of communication skills, team-work, problem-solving, initiative and enterprise skills, planning and organization, self-management, decision-making, computer skills and overall employability skills) is not significantly high.

2. Male students are not significantly different from their female counterparts in their acquisition of employability skills (in terms of communication skills, team work, problem solving, initiative and enterprise skills, planning and organization, self-management, decision-making, computer skills and overall employability skills).
3. Age does not have any significant influence on the acquisition of employability skills (in terms of communication skills, team work, problem solving, initiative and enterprise skills, planning and organization, self-management, decision-making, computer skills and overall employability skills).

METHODOLOGY

The study was an ex-post facto research. The research area was Imo State, one of the 36 states in Nigeria with two universities- Federal university of technology Owerri (FUTO) and Imo state university, Owerri. The population of the study was final year students in the two institutions in the 2013/2014 academic session. It was 6179 consisting of 3349 males and 2830 females. The sample consisted of 618 final year students drawn using satisfied sampling technique.

The instrument that was used for data collection was adapted from (Wafaa, 2011) scale, that was used in a similar study in Egypt. It is made up of 40 items of a 5 point modified Likert Scale of very low extent, low extent, moderate extent, high extent, and very high extent. The instrument was divided into 2 sections: section 1 sought information regarding demography while section 2 sought information regarding the 8 components of employability skills. Each of the component had 5 items. The reliability estimate for the instrument was carried out using test retest method and the coefficient of reliability ranges from 0.68 to 0.82 for the sub-components. The instrument was administered by the researchers and 2 other research assistants. Data was analyzed using population t-test, independent t-test and one-way ANOVA at .05 level of significance using SPSS.

RESULTS AND FINDING

Hypothesis 1

The level of employability skills acquisition (in terms of communication skills, team work, problem solving, initiative and enterprise skills, planning and organization, self-management, decision-making, computer skills and overall employability skills) is not significantly high. To test this hypothesis the researchers reasoned that for the level of employability skills to be considered significantly high, the scores made in each sub-component of employability skills should be greater than 15.00 (which is the midpoint between Very low extent" and Very high extent" that is, 3 multiplied by the number of items, 5 in each case. Similarly, for the overall employability skills to be considered significantly high, the score should be greater than 120 (i.e 3 multiplied by 40 items.

Thus, the null hypothesis (Ho) is that, the mean score representing university students' employability skills acquisition is not significantly high in terms of the various sub-components and overall. Mathematically;

H_o: μ = 15.00

H_i: μ > 15.00

The hypothesis was tested using the population t-test analysis for the sub-components and overall employability skills and the result is as presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Population t-test analysis of the extent of employability skills acquisition among university students (N=618)

Reference Onean = 15.00

Sub component	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	Sig.
Communication skills	618	20.5	7.21	*18.96	.000
Team work	618	18.2	8.22	*9.96	.000
Problem solving	618	19.2	8.26	*14.45	.000
Initiative & enterprise	618	23.3	10.51	*19.63	.000
Planning & organization	335	21.9	9.26	*18.52	.000
Self-management	618	19.3	8.71	*12.27	.000
Decision making	618	22.4	11.6	*15.86	.000
Computer skills	618	21.8	9.98	*16.84	.000
Overall	618	167.2	16.71	*70.22	.000

* Significant at .05 level

The result in Table 1 shows that the sample mean of the various sub-components of employability skills and the overall, and the significant t-values of communication skills (t-18.96), team work (t=9.68) problem – solving (t=14.45), initiative and enterprise (t-19.63) planning and organization (t=18.52), self-management (t=12.27) decision-making (t=15.86), computer skills (t=16.84) and overall (t=70.22). This implies that the null hypothesis which says that the level of employability skills (in terms of communication skills, team work, problem solving, initiative and enterprise skills, planning and organization, self-management, decision-making, computer skills and overall employability skills) is not significantly high among university students sampled is rejected. In other words, the employability skills of the students sampled in terms of the sub-component and overall was high.

Hypothesis 2

Male students are not significantly different from their female counterparts in employability skills acquisition (in terms of communication skills, team work, problem solving, initiative and enterprise skills, planning and organization, self-management, decision-making, computer skills and overall employability skills). The independent variable is gender, categorized into male and female, while the dependent variable is the 8 sub-components and overall employability skills). The hypothesis was analysed using independent t-test and the result is as shows in Table 2.

Table 2. Independent t-test analysis of gender on the 8 sub-components and overall employability skills

Variables	Group	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	Sig.
Communication skills	Male	335	18.5	7.21	*4.07	.002
	Female	283	16.1	6.21		
Team work	Male	335	15.8	6.61	*4.92	.001
	Female	283	18.5	7.12		
Problem solving	Male	335	15.9	6.11	*5.58	.000
	Female	283	19.2	8.21		
Initiative & enterprise	Male	335	17.2	6.26	*3.19	.004
	Female	283	19.1	8.19		
Planning & organization	Male	335	19.31	9.26	*4.72	.001
	Female	283	16.20	7.11		
Self-management	Male	335	18.91	7.11	*6.43	.000
	Female	283	15.21	6.21		
Decision making	Male	335	19.21	8.69	*6.82	.003
	Female	283	15.11	6.21		
Computer skills	Male	335	18.21	7.20	*4.86	.002
	Female	283	15.61	6.11		
Overall	Male	335	19.15	10.62	*2.49	.005
	Female	283	17.15	9.31		

*significant at .05 level

The result of Table 2 shows significant t-values for all the 8 sub-components and the overall employability skills. In other words, the null hypothesis which says that males are not significantly different from their female counterparts in their acquisition of employability skills in the 8 sub-components and overall is rejected. The direction of significance is in favour of males for communication skills, planning and organization, self-management, decision-making, computer skills and overall employability skills. On other hand, the direction of significance favoured females for team-work, problem-solving and initiative and enterprise.

Hypothesis 3

Age has no significant influence on the acquisition of employability skills (in terms of communication skills, team work, problem solving, initiative and enterprise skills, planning and organization, self-management, decision-making, computer skills and overall employability skills. The independent variable in this hypothesis is age categorized into 18-20 years, 21-23 years and 24 and above. The dependent variable is employability skills acquisition in the 8 – subcomponents and overall. The statistical technique used in the analysis was analysis of variance (ANOVA) and the result is as shown in Table 3.

The results of the actual analysis of variance (one way ANOVA) of the influence of age on students employability skills on the 8 sub-components and overall are shown in Table 3. The results showed calculated f-ratios as follows: communication skill (2.76), team – work (*11.55), problem-solving (0.22), initiative and enterprise (1.26) planning and organization (*8.74), self-management (0.86), decision-making (0.26), computer skills (1.13) and overall employability skills (1.75). From this result, the f-ratio for team work and Planning & organization are significant as they are greater than the critical f- ratio of 3.00 at .05 level with 2 and 615 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected for the sub-component of teamwork, planning and organization and retained for other 6 sub-components and the overall employability skills. In other word, there is a significant influence of age on university students' employability skills acquisition in the sub-component of team-work and planning and organization.

Table 3. Summary of result of one-way ANOVA of age on acquisition of employability skills

Sub- components	Group	N	$\bar{X}$	SD
Communication skills	18-20	203	14.52	8.51
	21-23	180	12.12	6.15
	24-above	235	11.13	6.03
Team work	18-20	203	12.31	7.21
	21-23	180	13.92	8.65
	24-above	235	12.11	8.15
Problem solving	18-20	203	10.31	6.25
	21-23	180	11.51	7.11
	24-above	235	13.63	8.31
Initiative & enterprise	18-20	203	9.91	6.01
	21-23	180	12.51	7.52
	24-above	235	13.52	8.15
Planning & organization	18-20	203	8.71	5.25
	21-23	180	13.49	6.35
	24-above	235	14.31	7.99
Self-management	18-20	203	11.31	8.01
	21-23	180	10.51	7.93
	24-above	235	9.31	7.63
Decision making	18-20	203	10.32	7.21
	21-23	180	10.01	7.01
	24-above	235	9.93	6.93
Computer skills	18-20	203	10.61	8.11
	21-23	180	10.78	7.91
	24-above	235	10.01	7.21
	Total	618	15.21	10.35
Overall	18-20	203	12.35	8.73
	21-23	180	15.81	9.11
	24-above	235	11.52	7.31

Table 3. Summary of result of one-way ANOVA (Cont'd)

Sub- components	Source of Variables	SS	df	MS	F
Communication skills	Between groups	40.62	2	20.31	2.76
	Within groups	4520.25	615	7.35	
	Total	4560.87	617		
Team work	Between groups	147.7	2	73.35	11.55*
	Within groups	3905.25	615	6.35	
	Total	4651.95	617		
Problem solving	Between groups	2.92	2	1.46	0.22
	Within groups	4003.65	615	6.51	
	Total	4006.57	617		
Initiative & enterprise	Between groups	50.30	2	25.15	1.26
	Within groups	12306.15	615	20.01	
	Total	12356.45	617		
Planning & organization	Between groups	124.26	2	62.13	8.74*
	Within groups	4372.65	615	7.11	
	Total	4496.91	617		
Self-management	Between groups	7.06	2	3.53	0.86
	Within groups	2521.5	615	4.10	
	Total	2528.56	617		
Decision making	Between groups	4.30	2	2.151	0.26
	Within groups	5000.57	615	8.131	
	Total	5004.87	617		
Computer skills	Between groups	22.62	2	11.31	1.13
	Within groups	6156.15	615	10.01	
	Total	6178.77	617		
Overall	Between groups	252.6	2	126.3	1.75
	Within groups	44347.65	615	72.11	
	Total	44600.25	617		

*significant at .05; f-critical=3.00

Given the significant F-ratio of team-work and planning and organization, a post hoc test using Fisher's LSD multiple comparison analysis was done to determine exactly which group (18-20 years, 21 - 23 years or 24 & above) differ significantly in terms of students employability skills acquisition in the 2 - sub-components. The results are shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4. Results of Fisher's LSD multiple comparison analysis of the influence of age on employability skills acquisition among university students in terms of team-work.

Age	18-20 years (203)	21-23 years	24 and above
18-20 yrs	12.31[a]	-1.61[b]	0.20
21-23 yrs	-6.24*[c]	13.92	1.81
24 & above	0.83	5.79*	12.11

MSW = 6.35

a =group means are placed along the diagonals
b = difference between group means are placed above the diagonal
c = fishers t – values are placed below the diagonal
*significant at .05 level, critical t=1.96, df =616.

The entries in Table 4 have shown significant Fishers t-values of -6.24 and 5.79 ad non-significant t-value of 0.83. This analysis revealed that students who age ranged from 21-23 years were better in their acquisition of the skill of teamwork than those of 18-20 years and 24 and above years. However, there was no difference between those age 18-20 years and 24 years and above.

Table 5. Results of Fishers LSD multiple comparison analysis of the confluence of age on employability skills acquisition among university students in terms of planning and organization

Age	18-20 years (203)	21-23 years (180)	24 years-above (235)
18-20 years	8.71[a]	-4.78[b]	-5.6
21-23 years	-20.10*[c]	13.49	-0.82
24 years and above	-21.92	-3.10*	14.31

$Ms_w = 7.11$

A = group means are placed along the diagonals
b = difference between group means are placed above the diagonal
c = Fisher's t-value are placed below the diagonal
* significant at 0.05 level, critical t=1.96, df = 616

The entries in Table 5 showed significant Fishers t-values of -20.10, 21.92 and -3.10. This analysis revealed that older students (24 and above) were better than 21-23 years in their acquisition of the skill of planning & organization while 21-23 years were better than younger students (18-20 years).

DISCUSSION

The first and major finding of this study shows that the students sampled for this study displayed a significantly high level of employability skills acquisition in terms of communication skills, team work, problem-solving, initiative and enterprise, planning and organization, self – management, decision-making, computer skills and overall employability. This finding is encouraging and an indication that all is not lost as far as tertiary education is concerned in Nigeria.

The second finding indicates that there is a significant influence of sex in employability skills acquisition of most of the components and overall an favour of male students. This finding is at variance with the findings of Ashibi, (2005). However, the findings confirm that of Uzoechi (2015) in which male students were generally better than their female counterparts in overall employability skills acquisition. Finally the variable of age on employability skills acquisition indicates that students sampled difference in 2 sub-components of team-work and planning and organization. The post-Hoc analysis revealed that students within the age range of 21-23 years were better than those within 18-20 years and 20 and above in the skills of teamwork. Moreso, students within the age range of 24 and above were better than those within 20-23 years, who were in turn better than youngers students (18-20 years). The finding confirms those of Uzoechi (2015) who found age difference only in two sub-component and not in the overall employability skills. However the finding was partly at variance in with those of Ibok (2013) and Okwilagwe & Falaye (2010) who discovered age difference as a serious factor.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

On the basis of these findings, it was concluded that university students employability skills acquisition is significantly high, and differ by gender; and that older students (24 and above years were better in the skill of planning and organization than younger ones. However considering that students now enter the University much earlier than before, the issue of employability skills should not be left to chance any longer, if we must shun out graduates who are globally competitive. It is therefore recommended that employability skills should be consciously embedded into the curriculum and taught to our undergraduates. Moreso, other employability skills enhancement policies such as work placement and having industry experts as guest lecturers should be encouraged.

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