STUDENTS' INDUSTRIAL WORK EXPERIENCE SCHEME DURING CORONA VIRUS EPIDEMIC AND STUDENTS EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS IN UNIVERSITIES IN NORTH-CENTRAL AND SOUTH-WESTERN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined Students' Industrial Work Experience Scheme during corona virus epidemic and students employability skills in universities in North-central and South-western Nigeria. The study sought answer to three research questions. Descriptive survey research design was used for the study. The population of the study was 1,619 business education students in public universities in North-central and South-western States, Nigeria. The entire population was used for the study. Questionnaire on Influence of SIWES on Students' Employability Skills (QISIWESSES) with Cronbach alpha reliability of 0.93 was used for data collection. Mean and standard deviation score was used to analyze the research questions. The findings of the study indicated that SIWES positively influence business education students' communication skill, teamwork skill and problem-solving skill to high extent during Corona Virus Epidemic. Based on the findings, the following are recommended among others; The industrial training should be more organized to sufficiently meet the practical needs of students. There is therefore very serious need for the stakeholders: universities, ITF and training establishments to collaborate more to strengthen the scheme. These stakeholders should be involved in the programme from the placement to the actual training period.
Keyword: Employability skills, Coronavirus, SIWES

Introduction

The development of a nation is highly dependent on the quality of education received by her citizens; hence, across the globe education has been seen as the ideal instrument for progress and survival of any nation. Education aims at producing citizens who are honest, respectful, skilled, co-operative and patriotic. The university's role in producing graduates in various fields to fulfill the market needs does not only focus on academic achievement, but also on developing generic skills or "soft skills" required for them to compete in the global market. It is believed that the Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme prepares students for several occupation and help prospective students develop the needed employability skills.

Employability skills are the skills, qualities and attitudes that employers regard as essential for the workplace. The capacity, power, authority, or competency to perform the task demanded of an individual on the job is referred to as employability skill acquisition. When learning a new skill, there are two crucial considerations. According to Okoro and Ursula (2012), the first is the conditions which promote acquisition, and the second is the change that will occur when the skill is acquired. Igwe (2008) observed that when somebody acquires skills in any occupation, such a person can easily be employed or can establish his own business and even employ others. The person becomes self-reliant, self-sufficient and can be self-employed. Some of the examples of employability skills required of business education students to be employed after graduation include communication skills, teamwork skills, problem-solving skills and technology skills among others (Ojokuku, et al 2015).

Furthermore, employers now place great importance on generic skills, one of which is communication skills, in choosing employees. Communication is a purposeful process of expressing, receiving and understanding messages containing factual information, feelings, ideas and needs by two or more individuals, through common symbols. Generally, communication can be defined as a process of exchanging information, from the person giving the information through verbal and non-verbal methods, to

the person receiving the information. The most common method of communication is verbal, using a specific language where it is a two-way process, with feedback on the message received. Communication also involves the exchange of ideas, opinions and information with a specific objective. Apart from oral communication, information can also be exchanged using symbols or signage. Communication has also been defined as sharing and giving meaning occurring at the same time through symbolic interactions (Seiler & Beall, 2015). Team can be defined as a group of individuals who work collectively to achieve the same purposes and goals to provide excellent quality services. Teamwork has the ability to enable the members of the team to have a higher level of emotional security, self-confidence and the ability to plan and decide with others positively. Also, it helps in creating a healthy work environment with workable agendas, creative activities, positive strategies and values. On the other hand, the absence of teamwork concepts and strategies can lead to occupational failure, disappointment, low morale and poor productivity which threatens the entity of the organization (Shouvik & Mohammed, 2018). Shouvik and Mohammed further stated that employees who work in an organization that does not have a strong concept of teamwork, usually fail to deliver the expected results and achieve the goals and vision of the organization.

Another employability skill concerning this study is the problem solving skills. There is no doubt that businesses face different issues from time to time, and the ability to solve business problems as they come will help an entrepreneur succeed in business. Jonassen (2011) is of the view that problem-solving skills are domain specific. According to the author, problem-solving is cognitive. That is, it occurs internally and thus can only be inferred indirectly by the persons' actions. Problem-solving skills are a set of skills that help an entrepreneur in solving problems related to his business and other areas of life. According to Nnajiofor (2014) problem and life is synonymous. Only death corresponds to a sustainable equilibrium. The skills identified in the above paragraph are needed for business education students to be able to function well in the world of work. However, the world of work and the society at large has been battling corona virus epidemic but there seems to a bigger challenge ahead which is, the global economy would never be the same.

The novel corona virus (COVID-19) disease was first identified in Wuhan, a city in China late 2019 and had spread rapidly to almost every region of the world (Saidu & ifuwa 2020). On February 27, 2020, Nigeria recorded her first case of the dreaded coronavirus (COVID-19) through an Italian citizen who traveled into the country, the reality that alerted the federal and state government to the responsibility of protecting its citizens (Saidu & ifuwa 2020). Government of nations are using different measures and strategies to curtail its spread. Measures and strategies such as (frequent washing of hands, keeping good hygiene, social distancing, use of face mask in public places and hand sanitizers), the authorization of the use of hydroxychloroquine and other drugs to fight the virus. The symptoms of the virus on infected individuals include fever, cough, and shortness of breath or difficulty in breathing, repeated shaking with chill, muscle pain, headach, sore throat and loss of taste or smell (Worldomester, 2020). This dreaded virus has caused negative impact on the global economy and has led to crisis in different businesses and enterprise across the globe.

Osuala (2013) considered Business Education as a broad area of knowledge that deals with a nation's economic system and also identifies and explains the rate of business contentment and experience that prepares individuals for effective participation as citizens, workers and consumers. It combines both theoretical and practical knowledge. In the same vein, it exposes the recipient to the economic systems of countries and equips him with lifelong skills that would enable him to make reasonable judgment as a producer (entrepreneur), employee or consumer of goods and services. Okpor and Hassan (2012) opined that if Business Education is to be meaningful and successful in Nigeria, relationships are needed between public and private sectors to collaborate effectively and harness programs that will bring about skill acquisition among the business students. One of the best programme in school that ensure students' employability skills before graduation is the Students' Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES).

Students' Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) is a skill development programme established by Industrial Training Fund (ITF) which was also established in 1973 with the headquarters in Jos Nigeria. The SIWES is meant to enable students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria acquire technical skills and experience for professional development in their courses of study as it bridges the gap between theory and practice. It is the accepted skills training programme in institutions of higher learning in Nigerian that forms part of the approved academic requirement in various degree programmes. As stated by Ojokuku

et.al (2015), the scheme is a planned, supervised training and intervention programme based on stated and specific learning and career objectives, leading to the development of occupational competencies of the participants. It is a programme required to be undertaken by all students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria pursuing courses in specialized areas of; engineering, technical, business, pure and applied sciences and applied arts (ITF, 2004). Therefore, SIWES is generic, cutting across over 60 programmes in the universities, over 40 programmes in the polytechnics and about 10 programmes in the colleges of education. Thus, SIWES is not limited to any one course of study or discipline (Ugwuanyi & Ezema, 2010). It is designed to prepare tertiary institutions students for transition from the college environment to work life (Akerejola, 2010).

Oyedele (2010) stated that SIWES is an educational program in which students participate in work activities while attending school. This work experience program gives students the opportunity to be part of an actual work situation outside the classroom. The impact of Students Industrial Work Experience (SIWES) has thus been a cause of concern to educational and economic planners, particularly with respect to graduate employment and entrepreneurship. According to Osemeke (2012), a skill implies an ability which can be developed, not necessarily inborn, and which is manifested in performance, not merely in potential. Omorugiewa (2009) said that all participating institutions in entrepreneurship training have come to a common decision that the entrepreneurial skills the students are able to acquire during their undergraduate training are not enough for a common (labour) market. Thus, it is imperative that university graduates must possess noticeable work skills. Nwanaka and Amaehule (2011) stated that it is only with skilled men that materials can be harnessed, manipulated and transformed into products. They further stressed that SIWES is the period of consistently converting goods and ideas into productive and profitable commercial ventures. Consequently, SIWES is an important instrument for students to acquire entrepreneurship skills.

Given the fact that SIWES is established as platform to enable students acquire the much-needed competencies/skills for productive work upon graduation, there should be effective, periodic monitoring and evaluation of Business Education trainees by the schools' departmental supervisors to assess the extent of knowledge and competencies/skills acquisition. Unless this is done, the training will amount to little more than an academic exercise. It is on the basis of this background therefore, that the study seeks to determine the influence of teaching practice and SIWES on business education students' employability skills in universities in North-central and South-western Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study
The main purpose of the study was to determine the influence of SIWES in COVID-19 era on Business Education students' employability skills in Universities in South-Western and North-Central Nigeria. The study sought to:
1. determine the extent to which SIWES during corona virus epidemic influence Business Education students' communication skill in universities.
2. examine the extent to which SIWES during corona virus epidemic influence Business Education students' acquisition of teamwork skill in universities.
3. investigate the extent to which SIWES during corona virus epidemic influence Business Education students' acquisition of problem solving skills in universities.

Research Questions
The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:
1. What is the extent to which SIWES during corona virus epidemic influence Business Education students' communication skills in universities?
2. What is the extent to which SIWES during corona virus epidemic influence Business Education students' acquisition of teamwork skill in universities?
3. What is the extent to which SIWES during corona virus epidemic influence Business Education students' acquisition of problem solving skill in universities?

Methodology
Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The study was a survey of 400 level business education students in universities in North-central and South-western, Nigeria. The population of the study consisted of 1,619 students and the entire population was used for the study. A structured questionnaire titled: Questionnaire on Influence of SIWES on Students' Employability Skills (QISIWESSES) designed

by the researcher and duly validated was used for data collection. The instrument has Cronbach alpha reliability of 0.93. The instrument had 41 items. The researcher and four-research assistants administered copies of the questionnaire and 1,454 were retrieved making 89.8% return rate, which were used for the analysis. The data collected to answer the research questions were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The decision value was fixed at 2.50.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the extent to which SIWES during corona virus epidemic influence Business Education students' communication skills in universities?

Table 1: Business education students' ratings of the items on extent to which SIWES influence students' communication skill in COVID-19 era

S/n	Item Statements	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remarks
1.	Enables me to work hard to become excellent at doing tasks by setting high standards, paying attention to details, working well and displaying a high level of concentrations	3.14	0.73	High extent
2.	Ability to easily refrain from saying something that will upset someone	3.13	0.69	High extent
3.	Ability to Demonstrates understanding, friendliness, adaptability, empathy and politeness in new and ongoing group settings.	3.13	0.70	High extent
4.	Asserts self in familiar and unfamiliar social situations, relates well to others and takes an interest in what others say and do	3.15	0.71	High extent
5.	l easily apologize to someone whose feeling l may have hurt at work	3.05	0.69	High extent
6.	I display high standards of ethical conduct and understands the impact of violating these standards on an organization, self and others.	3.06	0.71	High extent
7.	I help others learn needed knowledge and skills, identifies training need and supplies job information to help others.	3.01	1.05	High extent
8.	With SIWES experience I have learnt to recognize what others are feeling about what I am saying	3.14	0.72	High extent
9.	I have acquired skill to listen effectively to details and directive from the management	3.16	0.71	High extent
10.	Acquired skills to articulate	3.12	0.73	High extent
11.	I have developed the tendency to change the subject when other person's feelings enter into the discussion among team members	3.02	0.84	High extent
12.	Ability to make constructive criticism	3.00	0.74	High extent
13.	Ability to receives, attends to, interprets, and responds to verbal messages and other cues such as body language in ways that are appropriate to the purpose.	3.12	0.73	High extent
14.	Ability to organize ideas and communicates oral messages appropriately to listeners	3.16	0.71	High extent
15.	Ability to participates in conversation, discussion, and group presentations	3.13	0.69	High extent
16.	Improves on their communication skills by following the industry/organizations communication channel	3.06	0.70	High extent
17.	Improve on their public relation skills by interacting with suppliers, customers and competitors	3.13	0.69	High extent
	Grand Weighted Mean	**3.10**	**0.74**	**High extent**

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Data in table 1 revealed the students' mean ratings on items relating to the extent of influence of SIWES in COVID-19 era on business bducation students' communication skills in universities. The table showed that the respondents indicated high extent for all the constructs with mean ranging from 3.00 to 3.16. All the 17 items in Table 1 have low standard deviation values ranging from 0.69 to 0.84 which signifies low variability of responses. Generally, the table shows that students indicated high extent for all the constructs in relation to their communication skills through SIWES in COVID-19 era. This means that SIWES positively influence business education students' communication skills to high extent in universities in North-central and South-west, Nigeria. This is evident in the average mean and standard deviation scores of 3.10 and 0.74.

Research Question 2: What is the extent to which SIWES during corona virus epidemic influence Business Education students' acquisition of teamwork skill in universities?

Table 2: **Business education students' ratings of the items on the extent SIWES influence students' acquisition of teamwork skill in universities**

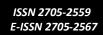| S/n	Item Statements	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remarks
1.	Ability to Focus on achieving collective results.	3.06	0.51	High extent
2.	Ability to assess knowledge and skills, distributes work accordingly among team, valuates performance and provides feedback	2.74	0.68	High extent
3.	Ability to develop trust among all team members	2.77	0.70	High extent
4.	Well-preparation to engage in various debates around ideas	2.76	0.69	High extent
5.	Ability to commit to decisions and plans of action	2.77	0.70	High extent
6.	Work as a team by relating with co-workers	2.99	1.06	High extent
7.	Imbibe the culture of punctuality to office work by signing attendance/movement register available for the team	3.11	0.79	High extent
8.	Develop the ability to exerts a high level of effort and perseverance toward goals attainment	2.86	0.79	High extent
9.	Acquisition of interpersonal team skill for successful team work	2.87	0.71	High extent
10.	Acquisition of self-management team skills for successful team work	2.99	0.67	High extent
11.	Development of collaboration attitude for successful team work	2.91	1.03	High extent
12.	Understanding the emotional intelligence of the team members for collaboration achievement	2.63	0.73	High extent
	Grand Weighted Mean	**2.87**	**0.76**	**High extent**

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Data in Table 2 showed business education students' ratings of items relating to the extent to which SIWES influence students' acquisition of teamwork skill in COVID-19 era. The table revealed that the respondents indicated high extent for all the item constructs with mean ranging from 2.63 to 3.11. All the 12 items in Table 2 have low standard deviation values ranging from 0.51 to 1.06 which signifies low variability of responses. In summary, Table 2 reveals that students' perception of the influence of SIWES on business education students' acquisition of teamwork skill in universities is positive and to high extent ($\bar{x}$=2.87, SD=0.76).

Research Question 3: What is the extent to which SIWES during corona virus epidemic influence Business Education students' acquisition of problem solving skill in universities?

Table 3: Business education students' ratings of the items on extent of SIWES on students' acquisition of problem-solving skills in universities

S/n	Item Statements	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remarks
1.	Ability to identify business opportunities through solving societal problems	3.03	1.01	High extent
2.	Ability to generate ideas suitable to the opportunities identified in problem solving	3.07	0.73	High extent
3.	Ability to believe in own self-worth and maintains a positives view of self in solving problems	2.94	0.98	High extent
4.	Ability to demonstrates knowledge of own skills, emotional capacity and needs and how to address them.	3.02	0.99	High extent
5.	Ability to evaluate all activities based on set goals	2.94	0.98	High extent
6.	Ability to Work and solve evolving difficulties while completing a task with minimal or no supervision.	3.06	0.96	High extent
7.	Ability to demonstrates high standards of attendance, punctuality, enthusiasm, vitality, and optimism in approaching and completing tasks	3.03	1.01	High extent
8.	Ability to display a high level of effort and commitment towards performing a given task	3.11	0.76	High extent
9.	Ability to recognize problems, identifies possible reasons for the discrepancy, devices and implements a plan of action to resolve it.	3.06	0.96	High extent
10.	Improves on technical skills by seeing, touching and practicing on machines, equipment and facilities not available in the institution	2.92	0.87	High extent

11.	Practice in a standard industry workshop/laboratory which helped to imbibe the work place culture of safety practices/ethics.	3.06	0.84	High extent
12.	Adapt to real industry/organization routine operations	3.01	1.06	High extent
	Grand Weighted Mean	**3.02**	**0.93**	**High extent**

Source: Field Survey, 2021.

Table 3 showed business education students' ratings of items relating to the extent to which SIWES influence students' acquisition of problem-solving skill. The table revealed that the respondents indicated high extent for all the constructs with mean ranging from 2.92 to 3.11. All the 12 items in Table 3 have low standard deviation values ranging from 0.73 to 1.06 which signifies low variability of responses. In summary, Table 3 reveals that students' perception of the influence of SIWES on business education students' acquisition of problem-solving skill in universities is positive and to high extent ($\bar{x}$=3.02, SD=0.93).

Discussion of Findings
The study found that SIWES positively influence business education students' communication skill, teamwork skill and problem-solving skill to high extent during Corona Virus Epidemic. This means that even with the presence of the pandemic and how it has affected the nature of the office, students that went on SIWES were able to still acquire the necessary employability skills. This indicated that the pandemic does not prevent students on SIWES from acquiring the necessary employability skills. This may be attributed to their exposure to different information c communication technology facilities which enable them to work even from home. These findings support an earlier finding of Mboto (2010) who stated that, level of employability skills assessed by engineering students from the employer's perspective is moderately high. The findings of the study also corroborate with earlier finding of Ukwueze (2011) who carried out a study on the impact of Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme (SIWES) on development of graduate employability skills and found that students experienced general improvement in critical thinking skills, and in their interaction with different groups, and various communities, of workers.

Conclusion
The study investigated Students' Industrial Work Experience Scheme during corona virus epidemic and students employability skills in universities in North-central and South-western Nigeria. This is a matter of concern, and presently, as the world is still battling with Corona Virus epidemic, employability skills are considered extremely important skills for any graduate that will be relevant in the world of work because the pandemic has change so many things including the way we work. This study concluded that, despite the presence and the acceptance of corona virus epidemic, SIWES positively influence business education students' communication skill, teamwork skill and problem-solving skill to high extent.

Recommendations
Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendation were made:
1. The industrial training should be more organized to sufficiently meet the practical needs of students. There is therefore very serious need for the stakeholders: universities, ITF and training establishments to collaborate more to strengthen the scheme. These stakeholders should be involved in the programme from the placement to the actual training period.
2. The universities must design a programme of training which should communicate the expected training needs of students to industry establishments and ensure that the training establishments are aware of this rather than leaving them to run the training as they deem fit.
3. Business education departments and ITF should also be more involved in the supervision of facilities and students in training because, strengthening the effectiveness of SIWES will make it possible for students to acquire those competencies/skills that will equip them for the job market.

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