Generic Skills and Technical, Vocational Education and Training Students' Attitudes in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

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Abstract: Most discussions concerning today's workforce eventually turn to employability or generic skills. Finding workers who have generic or job readiness skills that help them fit into the work environment has become a challenge. This study investigated the attitudes of students towards generic skills and Expunge. It was conducted at the University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. The population was 100 students comprising of Electrical Technology students in the Department Of Vocational Education. The stratified random sampling technique was used to sample 80 students for the study. Two research questions guided the study. It was found that students have a positive attitude towards generic skills, however, as their study year increases, the more of these generic skills they come to appreciate and develop. It was recommended among others that teachers should provide extensive practice in the application of these skills, using carefully structured activities and provide prompt constructive feedback on the students' efforts.

Keywords: Generic skills, Attitudes, TVET, Electrical Technology.

INTRODUCTION

In streamlining Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programmes in line with industry demands of developing both soft (generic) and hard skills purposefully and precisely, curriculum planners and teachers are introducing emerging pedagogies that are activity oriented, learner centred and authentic. Furthermore, cooperative programmes are being revitalized and it is now been seen as an effective tool for acquiring work related knowledge and skills. However, these methods all require that the students assume a more active role in the teaching and learning process. Attitudes towards new classroom environment, student centred and activity oriented teaching methods as well as attitudes towards generic skills, greatly influences the rate of adaptation and development of generic skills and task performance.

Most discussions concerning today's workforce eventually turn to employability or generic skills. Finding workers who have generic or job readiness skills that help them fit into and remain in the work environment has become a challenge. The challenge for employers today are sourcing for very promising workers and training them. The skills possessed by graduates seem to be different from what employers are looking for. This skills gap, that is, the difference between the skills demanded by industries and that possessed by new graduands or job seekers is of grave concern to employers looking to hire competent employees. Kamsah opined that all employers would prefer to hire people who are well trained and competent, but they are often willing to provide the specialized, job specific training essential for those lacking such skills [1].

Generic skills are the non-technical skills needed for adaptability in the work place. Generic skills act as the interface for the development of technological skills, aiding in the adaptation to new work conditions and development of new skills while on the job. Kearns defines generic skills as key competencies that can be used across a large number of different occupations and they provide a platform for the development of employability skills needed by young people and adults [2]. Generic skills are a prelude to the development of employability skills and they involve little or no interaction with machines, but help individuals maintain positive social relationships and contribute to the work environment.

Generic or Soft skills are the ability to communicate effectively, promote teamwork within organization, present ideas, manage projects and people, solve problems and provide excellent service. Soft skills also include strategic thinking, managing processes and technologies and building professional relationships. They are critical to the success of the

individual and organization, regardless of career level, they are also absolutely essential skills to have for fostering career development. As an individual climbs up the career ladder, they need more of these skills to go up and stay up.

Generic skills are employability skills used in the application of knowledge. Technical Education graduates are not lacking in core technical skills, but they lack competency in generic skills that enable them to use their technical skills more effectively. Generic skills enable them to use their technical abilities as a part of a team, to understand conflict as a means for discussion instead of an angry confrontation, to appreciate diversity and to respect difference as a creative opportunity rather than an obstacle.

Graduates lacking of generic skills is a global issue. Employers worldwide found far too many entry level job applicants deficient in generic skills and want the public schools or institutions of higher learning to place more emphasis on developing these skills [3]. Educators are faced with the challenge of preparing students for the challenging and dynamic work environment of the global knowledge economy. Through designing new programmes and cooperative education, which gives students direct learning at the work place, students develop the skills needed for the new industrial environment. However, individuals faced with school-related, work-related, or everyday life tasks, bring to bare, a blend of knowledge, skills and attitudes in accomplishing them [4]. Knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSA) interact with each other and with the task in complex ways to produce degrees of success or failure. Evidently, while skills define a person's competence or ability to do a task, attitudes influence willingness and the effort expended to perform a task [5]. It thus boils down to the attitudes of the students towards generic skills and task performance. The students' perceived importance and disposition towards developing and integrating these skills is essential to the instructional process and developing work-related skills. Work-related skills and attitudes include cooperative skills; personal qualities such as individual responsibility, self-esteem, self-management and sociability. They influence a person's motivation to respond to a task in either adaptive or maladaptive ways.

Statement of the Problem

Employers' dissatisfaction with young job applicants is not primarily due to inadequate technical knowledge or their skill performance, but they do have serious reservations when it comes to their non-technical abilities[6]. Embedding a skill in a learning activity, purposefully and precisely utilizing both direct and indirect means will greatly influence its transfer. However, some capabilities-particularly critical and creative thinking and affective traits essential for developing generic skills, are dependent on students'

positive attitude and a cooperative manner, which are qualities that people either have or don't have. It seems clear that individuals may not be able to bring their basic and complex skills to bear on a task effectively if they lack attitudes conducive to work. Conversely, a person who is unskilled but bubbling over with positive work attitudes may be a good candidate for education or skill training. However, those with only basic skills and prosocial attitudes, although perhaps readily trainable, will have limited roles in the workplace and limited ability to adapt to workplace change. Complex reasoning skills and work-related attitudes, in particular, appear to be key attributes for adapting to changes in the workplace. These are the attributes that employers value and school reformers hope to impart [7]. Poor students' attitude towards generic skills has resulted in students falling short of developing a range of attributes and generic skills which will enable TVET graduates to function effectively in a wide range of social and professional contexts [8].

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of this study was to determine the influence of electrical technology students' attitude on the development of generic skills and task performance. Specifically, this study sought to

1. Ascertain electrical technology students' attitude towards the development of generic skills in the University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State

Research Questions

1. What is the attitude of Electrical Technology students towards generic skills in the University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State?
2. Is there any difference on the attitude of Electrical Technology students towards generic skills based on their level (year) of study?

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference in the attitude of Electrical Technology students towards generic skills.

RESEARCH METHOD

A survey design was adopted for the study. The design was considered suitable for the study as it employs the study of a small sample to make inference on a larger population. The population for the study is 100 comprised of electrical technology students in the Department Of Vocational Education, University Of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. 80 students randomly selected constituted the sample. The stratified random technique was used in the sampling. The researchers' developed instrument called "Generic Skills and Students' Attitude Questionnaire" (GSSAQ), was face and content validated by 3 experts in the faculty of education, one expert from test and measurement and

two other experts from the department of vocational education. Test retest reliability was used to establish the reliability of the instrument. The coefficient was 0.87. The mean was used to answer the research questions while ANOVA was used to test the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance and the cut-off mean was set at 3.0.

DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION
Research Question 1: What is the attitude of electrical technology students towards generic skills in the University of Uyo, Akwa Ibom State?

Table 1: Attitudes of students towards Generic Skills

S/N	Items	$\overline{X}$	Decision
1	I occasionally use group as a resource	2.7	Low attitude
2	I take responsibility for group actions	2.6	Low attitude
3	I contribute to class discussions with teachers	3.4	*
4	I enjoy collecting, analysing and organising information	3.4	*
5	I enjoy working on new projects in class	3.5	*
6	I am persistent in my efforts in class	3.4	*
7	I work better when I am working with my fellow students	3.3	*
8	I love being adaptable to change	3.4	*
10	I worry less about what people say about me	3.5	*
11	I love speaking up in class	2.8	Low attitude
12	I love speaking on behalf of my friends	3.7	*
13	I always stick to a task until it is completed	3.4	*
14	I finish my work on time	3.5	*
15	I always want to learn a broad set of skills that will allow me to change jobs or industries if and when I want to	3.6	*
16	I Enjoy learning on my own after classes	3.5	*
17	I solve difficult problems on my own after classes	3.4	*
18	I always enjoy working with computers	3.8	*
19	I always enjoy surfing the net	3.8	*
20	I find it easy relating with my fellow students during classes	3.7	*
21	I find it thrilling working on projects with my fellow students	3.5	*
22	I always look forward to working in teams with my course mates	3.6	*
23	I always work on Microsoft office packages	2.8	Low attitude
24	I want to learn skills that are directly related to my field only	4.8	Low attitude

Where * High attitude

From Table 1, the analysis of the data shows that the students do have a positive attitude towards generic skills. Students who enjoy collecting, analyzing and organizing information, will be prompt in gathering and analyzing data, while students who work better when working with fellow students will be good team players and will develop good relational skills. Students who worry less about what others think about them and can speak up in classes will develop good self confidence, while students who can solve problems on their own will develop problem solving and thinking skills.

Research Question 2 - Is there any difference on the attitude of Electrical Technology students towards generic skills based on their level (year) of study?

Table-2: Responses of Students towards generic skills based on their year of study.

S/N	Year of study	n	Mean ($\overline{X}$)	remark
1	Level 100	20	2.6	Low attitude
2	Level 200	18	2.6	Low attitude
3	Level 300	8	2.8	Low attitude
4	Level 400	4	3.0	Positive attitude
5	Postgraduate students	30	3.8	Positive attitude

Table 2 gives the mean score of students based on their level of studies. The data reveals that the first and second year students had men scores of 2.6, while year 3 students had a mean score of 2.8, which is actually below the cut-off mean. However, students in their final year and students pursuing higher degrees

had mean score of 3.0 and 3.8 respectively. This means that postgraduate students had very highly positive attitude and disposition towards generic skills.

Hypothesis

Ho₁: There is no significant difference in the attitude of Electrical Technology students towards generic skills.

Table 3: Hypothesis Testing for Difference

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	101.003	1	101.003	240.345*	.000
Within Groups	28.997	69	.420		
Total	130.000	70			

Table 3 shows the analysis of variance testing for significant difference in the attitudes of students towards generic skills. The calculated F-value of 240.35 is higher than the critical value (0.00). Hence, the null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, there is significant difference in the attitudes of Electrical technology students towards generic skills, with the final year and postgraduate students having a positive attitude towards generic skills.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that Electrical Technology students in the University of Uyo have a positive attitude towards generic skills. The findings are in line with the work of Callan [6] that most students wanted to learn broader skills that would allow them to change jobs. However, more than half of them also said they wanted to learn only skills that were relevant to the industry they wanted to work in. This finding generally supports the opinions among teachers that students are often narrowly focused upon the more technical skills, and do not fully appreciate the value of generic skills. The findings also show that students have positive disposition towards generic skills as their year of study increases. They start appreciating each other, competition wines down as years goes by, cooperation, problem-solving, critical thinking, communication and adaptation then becomes an integral part of studies and campus life.

CONCLUSION

Students' attitudes greatly influence their development of generic skills. Students rank themselves high when it comes to attributes like having good communication skills, high self esteem and confidence, being adaptable to change and are also favourably disposed to self directed learning. However, as their study year increases, the more of these generic skills they come to appreciate and develop.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made
1. Teachers should make explicit the implicit behaviour associated with successful application of generic skills.

2. Teachers should provide extensive practice in the application of the skills, using carefully structured activities and provide prompt constructive feedback on the students' efforts.
3. Teachers should identify the generic skills they want their students to develop, include them in the course syllabus and the university catalog and communicate their importance to the students.

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