



## Soft Skills Required of Business Education Graduates: Perception of Students and Lecturers of Colleges of Education in Oyo State

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### Abstract

The study was conducted to assess the level of students' and lecturers' perception to soft skills, identify the difference in the perception of students and lecturers in soft skills and as well identify the difference in the perception of respondents in various colleges of education on the soft skills required of Business Education graduates in Oyo state. Descriptive design of survey type was adopted. The target population for the study were the students and lecturers of Business Education department and two federal and state owned colleges of education in Oyo town were purposively sampled. Forty students in the department of Business Education were randomly selected from each of the three levels in the institutions and ten lecturers were equally selected from each school making a total of 240 students and 20 lecturers. Out of the 240 questionnaires administered, 237 were duly returned. Three research questions were answered and tested at 0.05 level of significance. A questionnaire measuring the perception of students and lecturers was used to gather data from the respondents. Methods of data analysis that were used included frequencies, percentages mean and independent sample *t*-test. Findings indicate that majority of the students and lecturers are highly perceived on the required soft skills for graduates of Business Education. However, the lecturers had more perception than the students probably due to their level of experience. It was recommended that self-development should be encouraged by the students, schools should introduce acquisition of skills to their curriculum and lecturers should also involve their students in solving uphill tasks in a bid to enhance their practical ability.

**Keywords:** Soft skills, Business Education Graduates, Students and Lecturers Perception

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### Introduction

In recent times employers of labour as well as educators frequently complain about deficiency in soft skills among graduates from tertiary institutions. Importance of soft skills in this present generation cannot be jettisoned most especially in the world of work. Soft skills are success based on experiences in different management positions, primarily within human resources. Successful managers who were promoted had both excellent technical and soft skills, especially the willingness and ability to work positively with others. Soft skills are as important as cognitive skills that graduates of 21<sup>st</sup> century must have possessed for right placement in any organisation. The most pressing skills required of graduates in the 21<sup>st</sup>

century consisted of: (a) the Connection included the information literacy skill digital literacy skill, and communication skill (b) the Creative included the analytical skill, problem solving skill, and creativity & innovative skill (c) the Cooperation included interpersonal skill, collaboration skill, and teamwork skill (Somprach, et al. 2014). This implies that teachers' competency in development of soft skills became the crucial factor to improve the teachers' performance in discharging their duties. Teachers' effective performance cannot manifest in isolation without development of soft skills.

From the look of things, teachers may not achieve its educational objectives without adequate development of soft skills that will



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enable him/her function in the classroom environment. This will assist the learners in no measure after completion of their programme of study. Business education graduates are required to possess certain number of soft skills for them to meet up with present challenges in the labour market. It is imperative that both the lecturers and the students must acquire and take soft skills as one of the most pressing in the labour market in this globalise world of work.

Acquisition of these skills will go a long way in the lives of both the teachers and the learners. According to Kechagias in Somprach et al. (2014) soft skills is an intra and inter-personal or socio-emotional skills essential for personal development, social participation and workplace success. They include such skills as ability to work on multi-disciplinary teams, effective communication, cultural awareness and expression, diligence, adaptability and honesty among others. It is an essential skill that must be possessed by an individual to function effectively in order for better and efficient performance in any working environment. It is nontechnical traits and behaviours needed by Business Education graduates for successful career navigation in the world of work. Business Education graduates in contemporary world of work today, find it difficult to perform to the uttermost due to lack or ill sufficient of soft skills. This has made the employers of labour not to be satisfied with output of Business Education graduates.

Business Education is an integral part of vocational and technical education which is meant to produce graduates with competent, skillful in both soft skills and hard skills. To Edokpolor and Owenvbiugie, (2017) opined that Business Education is a programme of instruction that offers various skills in accounting, marketing and Office Technology and Management (OTM). Val-Ossai and Akpomi (2017) saw Business Education as a programme in education that prepares students for entry into and advancement of jobs within the business. The authors further said that it is an education programme which involves acquisition of skills, knowledge and competencies which make the recipient/beneficiary proficient. Emeasoba

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(2016) succinctly affirmed that Business Education is a tripartite programme that prepares its recipient for the world of work both as a business studies teacher, business office employee or employer of labour/entrepreneur. This implies that both business education teachers and graduates must be encompassed with a set of capabilities that will help them to meet with the current challenges in the world of work.

In contemporary world of work today, soft skills have been recognised as one of the basic attribute that employers of labour are looking from graduate to perform effectively. Soft skills are personality traits, social gracefulness, fluency in communication, personal habits, interpersonal relation, and optimism to varying degrees (Pachauri & Yadav, 2014). Ginting (2016) classified soft skills as intra- and inter-personal (socio-emotional) skills, essential for personal development, social participation, and workplace success. He further suggested that soft skills should be distinguished from technical skill. Vasanthakumari (2019) affirmed that soft skills are a combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, character or personality traits, attitudes, career attributes, social and emotional intelligence, intelligence quotients, that enable people to navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals with complementing hard skills. With the importance attached to soft skills in recent times, productive performance of Business Education graduates are emphasising the development of soft skills.

As a result of various factors, today's business environment has become more complex, unclear and competitive. Organisations now consider human resources as key asset which determines organisational performance and success. Employers are now more likely to employ, retain and promote employees that are involved in organisational performance and success. Most employers are likely to hire, retain and promote persons who possessed different combination of soft skills. Even though firms expect their employees to have discipline based knowledge, adequate level of soft skill is equally desired for the employee to move forward in their career (Mitchell, et al.,



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2010). It has become clear that hard skills alone are insufficient to achieve organizational goals and objectives. Since employees will be involved in different leadership and decision-making positions. For these reasons, acquisition of soft skills is germane in this 21<sup>st</sup> century for any organisation or institution to achieve its stated goals and objectives. These soft skills include: communication soft skills, teamwork, analytical thinking, problem solving, leadership skills and time management (Tang, 2018).

Communication soft skills are the tools used to clearly and effectively converse with others, set expectations, and work with others on projects in any organisation. It is a form of verbal and written communication used in every day at the working place. Whether for writing a cover letter to apply for a job, taking up an issue with manager, or looking to green light a new initiative at work. Every professional irrespective of their field should be able to convey their thoughts with clarity and confidence both in written and oral forms. Klein, in Ann-Marie (2015) viewed communication skills as the ability to actively listen, to communicate in oral, written, and nonverbal forms. He further reported the view of employers of labour on Business Education graduates that they lacked soft skills, including communication skills.

Business Education graduates are expected to possess the spirit of working collaboratively with others in order to achieve certain goals. Team work skills involve the ability to work and cooperate with people from various social and cultural backgrounds so as to achieve a common goal. In order to build a good working relationship with his/her peers, it is essential that they are respectful toward others' attitude, behaviour, and belief. Tang (2018) stated that teamwork skill means the capacity to graft and collaborate with individuals from numerous social and cultural experiences in order to accomplish a collective objective. Ability to work in a team effectively bring about bond among the workers and ensure they work with unity which helps to achieve high level of productivity but if there are workers within a team who did not have good teamwork skill it

can affect the level of productivity of the team (Hanaysha, 2016).

Another important soft skill required of Business Education graduates is analytical thinking. Analytical skills are the traits and abilities that allow Business Education graduates to observe, undertake research and interpret a subject in order to develop complex ideas and solutions. It is one of the critical component of mental activity that enables both the teachers and students of Business of Education to solve problems quickly and effectively. This includes a methodical grading approach that allows complex issues to be fragmented into simpler and more manageable components (Rasheva-Yordanova, et al., 2018). Analytical thinking can be applied in every situation, such as developing or improving programs or products, relational issues, processes, identifying audience and client needs and more. Analytical thinking will assist Business Education graduates to investigate complex issues, make decisions and develop solutions. It is an in-depth way of investigating a problem and finds the ideal solution in a timely and efficient manner.

Problem solving does not just require analytical, creative and critical skills, but a particular mind-set; those who can approach a problem with a cool and level head will often reach a solution more efficiently than those who cannot. This is a soft skill which can often rely on strong teamwork. In life situation, problems need not always be solved alone but ability to know who can help reach a solution, and how they can do it, can be of great advantage. Problem solving is the act of describing the problem, stating the cause of the problem, identifying and providing solutions to the problems identified in a manageable manner (Zoe, 2020). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Business Education graduates should be able to identify and solve problem at any given time for success to be achieved.

Leadership is the ability to influence others, with or without authority. Leadership skill refers to the knowledge of the basic theories of leadership so that lecturers are able to lead a project at the school level (Tang, 2018). Lecturers play a vital part in constructing the soft skills of a student. Leadership is a soft skill



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that can show even if one is not directly managing others. Those with strong leadership skills will have the ability to inspire others and lead teams to success (Sheriff et al., 2017). People with good leadership skills will have a range of skills that are useful in the workplace, including a positive attitude and outlook, the ability to make quick and effective decisions, exemplary problem-solving or conflict management skills, the ability to communicate effectively and an aptitude for both self-motivating and motivating others. Even thus applying for an entry-level role, should not be afraid to demonstrate potential by showing how they have positively influenced others to take a project to success. Leadership skill entails the ability of novice lecturer to lead in various activities. It is also essential that Business Education lecturers understand the role of a leader and be able to carry out those roles interchangeably (Tang et al., 2015).

### Statement of the Problem

Level of unemployment has been on the high side and continues to increase; meanwhile higher institutions produce thousands of graduates on yearly basis which means the level of competition on graduates to get employed is increasing on yearly basis. Twenty-first century employer does not necessarily pay graduates salary for the certificate they possessed but the problems they can solve within the walls of the classrooms. The reality of life is that there are more employable graduates than the available jobs and it is only graduates that can actively think beyond their certificate that would find their own place in life. Therefore, those to be employed must show something extra than just the knowledge of subject matter which are the soft skills that are highly needed by employers and business executives. The importance of soft skills on graduate's employability in this dispensation has been noticed by the employers of labour. A study by Majid, et al. (2012) on importance of soft skills for education and career success of undergraduate business management students from four universities in Singapore found out fourteen soft skills, meanwhile the top four skills identified by the students as soft skills are communication, leadership, persuasion and negotiation skills.

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Also in a study by Robles (2012) on executive perception of the 10 soft skills needed in current workplace (Integrity, Communication, Courtesy, Responsibility, Interpersonal skills, Professionalism, Positive attitude, Teamwork skills, Flexibility and Work ethic), and the top four adjudged to be most important by the executives are Integrity, Communication, Courtesy and Responsibility. Therefore, this study determined the perception of students and lecturers on the soft skills (communication skill, team work, analytical thinking, problem solving, leadership skills and time management) required by Business Education graduates to have favourable advantage in the labour market.

### Purpose of the Study

1. Examine the level of students' and lecturers' perception on soft skills (communication skills, team work, analytical thinking, problem solving, leadership skills and time management) required of business education graduates.
2. Identify the difference in the perception of students and lecturers on soft skills required of business education graduates.
3. Identify the mean scores on the perception of respondents on soft skills required of business education graduates based on the types of colleges of education.

### Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the level of students' perception to soft skills (communication skills, team work, analytical thinking, problem solving, leadership skills and time management) required of business education graduates?
2. What is the level of lecturers' perception to soft skills (communication skill, team work, analytical thinking, problem solving, leadership skills and time management) required of business education graduates?
3. What are the mean scores on the perception of lecturers and students on soft skills required of Business Education graduates?



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**Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant difference in the perception on students and lecturers in soft skills required of Business Education graduates.
2. There is no significant difference in the perception on respondents (students and lecturers) in communication, team work, analytical thinking, problem solving, leadership and time management skill required of Business Education graduates based on the types of colleges of education.

challenging goals along with appropriate feedback contribute to higher and better performance in life. Goal setting theory examine and report the cognitive, emotional and social dimensions of behavior, including soft skill performances, with reference to goals and their characteristics (Gibb, 2014). This implies that goal setting theory explained the link between goal and performance. It is used to evaluate performance and feedback in order to create commitment and acceptance. Goal setting theory serves as a fundamental to students’ long-term success. This increases students’ goal-setting skills and self-efficacy in learning process. Goal setting theory assist the students to set their priority and identify their goals, plan, anticipate ways of achieving it, avoid procrastination and access motivation when there are obstacles on their way.

**Theoretical Framework**

Goal setting theory was propounded by Edwin Locke in1960. This theory stated that goal setting is essentially linked to task performance. It explains that specific and

**Conceptual Framework**

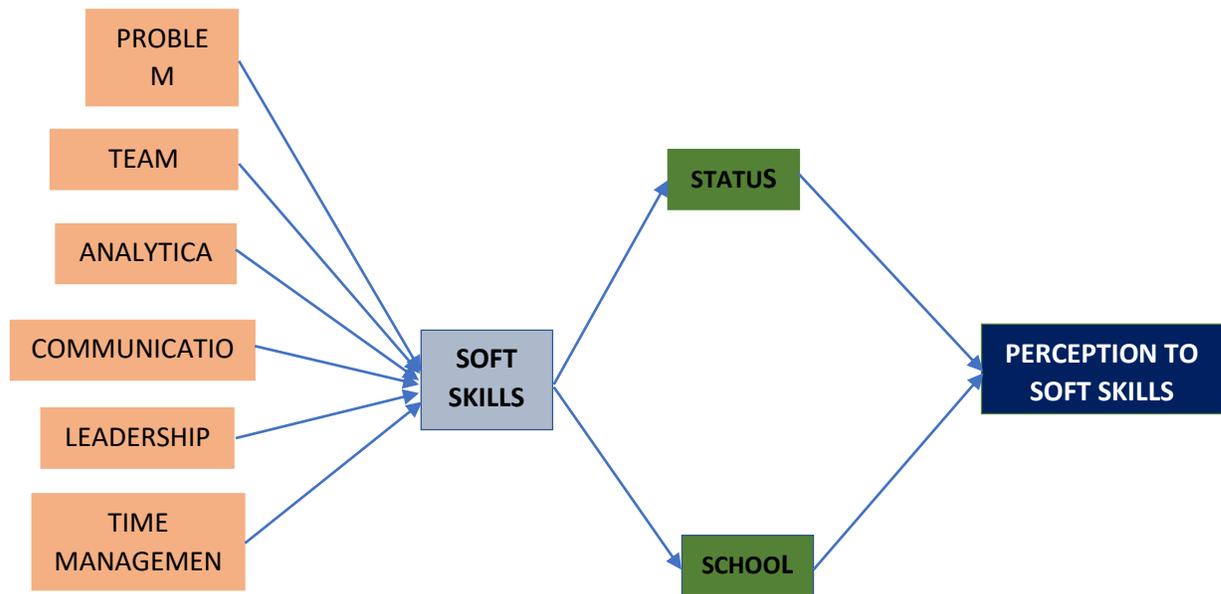


Figure 1: **Research Framework**

Problem solving, team work, analytical skills, communication skills, leadership skills and time management skills are some out of the numerous kinds of soft skills that is expected to be possessed by job applicants from employer. The study then wants to know how status of samples in the study (lecturers and students)

and Institution Emmanuel Alayande College of Education (EACOED and Federal College of Education FCE (Special) Oyo) influence their perception on the most important soft skills out of the six to be considered in this study for Business Education graduate’s employability in the labour market.



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**Methodology**

Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised all the Business Education Students and Lecturers of Colleges of Education. Purposively, the Federal and State owned colleges of education in Oyo town were used because they both offer Business Education programme and have been in operation for years. Forty (40) students in the department of Business Education were randomly selected from each of the three levels in the institutions and 10 lecturers were also selected from each school making a total of 240 students and 20 lecturers. The questionnaire contained 48 items designed to elicit answer to the research questions in the colleges covered in the study by the researcher. The response pattern adopted for the questionnaire was four-point Likert rating scale of: Very Important (VI), Important (I), Less Important (LI) and Not Important (NI). The questionnaire is titled: Perception of Students and Lecturers on

Business Education Graduates' Required Soft Skills Questionnaire (PSLBEGRSSQ) and was used to gather data from the respondents. The reliability of the instrument was determined using ordinal alpha with a co-efficient value of 0.94. Out of the 240 questionnaires administered, 237 were duly returned. The data generated was analysed using frequency counts and percentages and also with inferential statistics of Independent Sample t-test.

**Results**

**Research Question One:** What is the level of student's perception on soft skills (communication skills, team work, analytical thinking, problem solving, leadership skills and time management) required of Business Education graduates?

Research question one was answered based on the rating scale as responded to by the students of the sampled colleges of education (EACOED and FCE), Oyo, Oyo State, Nigeria as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Level of Student's Perception on Soft Skills Required of Business Education Graduates**

Levels	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage
Low	48-95	0	0-0
Moderate	96-143	35	14-8
High	144-192	202	85-2
Total		<b>237</b>	<b>100-0</b>

Mean score of the responses were summed up, converted to frequency and percentage. Hence, the decision was taken based on the level with highest frequency and percentage. Table 1 reveals the level of student's perception on soft skills (communication skills, team work, analytical thinking, problem solving, leadership skills and time management) required of Business Education graduates. Based on the participants self-rating, it was indicated that most students that participated perceived that soft skills are highly required by Business Education graduates. The range was determined by aggregating the 48 items and multiplied by 4 (response scale) equalled to 192. The maximum minus minimum (192-48) equalled to 144 divided by 3(levels). Therefore, the data was recorded to 48-95 = 1, 96-143 = 2, and 144-192 = 3. Hence, the frequency and

percentage were used to determine the level. It implies that students are fully aware of soft skills required of them after graduation from the college of education as business educators since 85.2% of their rating is within the range of 144-192 on the aggregate.

**Research Question Two:** What is the level of lecturer's perception to soft skills (communication skill, team work, analytical thinking, problem solving, leadership skills and time management) required of Business Education graduates?

Research question two was answered based on the rating scale as responded to by the lecturers of sampled colleges of education (EACOED and FCE), Oyo, Oyo State, Nigeria as shown in Table 2.



**Table 2: Level of Lecturer’s Perception on Soft Skills Required of Business Education Graduates**

Levels	Score Range	Frequency	Percentage
Low	48-95	0	0
Moderate	96-143	0	0
High	144-192	20	100
Total		<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

Mean score of the responses were summed up, converted to frequency and percentage. Hence, the decision was taken based on the level with highest frequency and percentage. Table 2 reveals that the level of lecturers’ perception on soft skills (communication skills, team work, analytical thinking, problem solving, leadership skills and time management) required of Business Education graduates. Based on the Business Education lecturers’ rating, it was revealed that they all have high perception of the required soft skills for graduates of Business Education. The range was determined by aggregating the 48 items and multiplied by 4 (response scale) equalled to 192. The maximum minus minimum (192-48) equalled to 144 divided by 3(levels). Therefore, the data was recorded to 48-95 = 1, 96-143 = 2, and 144-192 = 3. Hence, the frequency and percentage were used to determine the level. It implies that lecturers are fully aware of soft skills required of them after graduation from the college of education as business educators since 100% of their rating is within the range of 144-192 on the aggregate.

**Research Question Three:** What is the difference in the perception of lecturers and students on soft skills required of Business Education graduates?

**Table 3: Respondents’ Means Scores and standard deviation on the perception of soft skills**

Soft Skills	Mean	Std. Dev.
Communication skills	3.28	0.98
Teamwork Skills	2.91	1.38
Analytical Skills	2.85	1.79
Problem Solving Skills	3.10	2.11
Leadership Skills	3.28	1.12
Time Management Skills	2.91	1.76

**Benchmark = 2.50**

Table 3 revealed the mean scores of the various soft skills. The results of the analysis revealed that all the soft skills listed had a higher mean than the benchmark mean of 2.50. This implies that the soft skills were highly required of the Business Education Graduates. The soft skills were:

- i. *Communication skills* ( $M = 3.28, SD = 0.98$ )
- ii. *Team work* ( $M = 2.91, SD = 1.38$ )
- iii. *Analytical thinking* ( $M = 2.85, SD = 1.79$ )
- iv. *Problem solving skills* ( $M = 3.10, SD = 2.11$ )
- v. *Leadership skills* ( $M = 3.28, SD = 1.12$ )
- vi. *Time management skills* ( $M = 2.91, SD = 1.76$ )

This shows that business education graduates are to possess these soft skills even after school to enable them become successful employees.

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant difference in the perception of students and lecturers in soft skills required of business education graduates.

**Table 4: Perception on Soft Skills required of Business Education Graduates based on their status**

Status	N	Mean	SD	SEM	Mean Diff.	T	Df	P	Decision
Students	237	162.31	16.93	1.102	18.64	11.22	255	.000	Rejected
Lecturers	20	180.95	5.69	1.243					

**Significant  $p < 0.05$**

Table 4 indicates that the mean score of lecturers’ perception on soft skills required of Business Education graduates is higher than

that of students. The mean difference is 18.65, the independent t-test showed that the difference is statistically significant,  $t = 11.22$ ,



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df = 255,  $p < 0.05$ . This implies that lecturers as educator are abreast of these soft skills more than the students who are the end users.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant difference in the perception of respondents (students and lecturers) in soft skills required of business education graduates based on the types of colleges of education?

**Table 5: Soft skills required of Business Education Graduates based on their college**

Colleges	N	Mean	SD	SEM	Mean Diff.	T	Df	P	Decision
EACOED	128	164.65	17.08	1.509	1.633	0.765	255	0.445	Accepted
FCE	129	163.02	17.13	1.508					

**Significant  $p < 0.05$**

Table 5 reveals that the mean score of soft skills required of Business Education graduates of EACOED respondents is higher than that of FCE respondents. The mean difference is 1.63, the independent t-test indicated that the difference is not statistically significant,  $t = 0.77$ ,  $df = 255$ ,  $p > 0.05$ . This means that, the perception of respondents varies across institutions, that is, institution type or ownership determines the soft skills required of the Business Education graduates.

The findings of the study revealed that:

1. the lecturers have better perception on the individual soft skills compared to the students.
2. the lecturers had better perception on the totality of the soft skills required of business education graduates than their students.
3. soft skills were highly required of the Business Education Graduates by the respondents.
4. the difference in the perception of students and lecturers in soft skills required of business education graduates is statistically significant.
5. there was no statistical significant difference in the perception of students and lecturers in soft skills required of business education graduates based on institutions.

### Discussion of Finding

Result from research question one showed that lecturers have better perception on the individual soft skills like communication, team work, analytical thinking, problem solving, leadership and time management skills required of business education graduates than their students. This can be as a result of their experience in their workplace overtime and the

interaction with professional colleagues through collaboration and cross fertilization of ideas. This assertion is in consistent with the findings of Tang et al. (2015) who discovered that teachers developed team work skill as well as other important soft skills during their teaching professional training. The teachers also stated that they attained team work skill through activities such as development of human capital, field work, and group work assignment that required them to work with the other members in the team.

Findings from the research question two proved that lecturers had better perception on the totality of the soft skills required of business education graduates than their students. This corroborates the findings of Wilhelm (2004) who stated that teachers and employers have keyed into the paradigm shift in their desire to adjust to the needs and necessities for soft skills. They have even gone ahead to rate soft skills to be number one important consideration for entry-level success on the job.

Findings from research question three revealed that the soft skills were highly required of the Business Education Graduates. This shows that business education graduates are to possess these soft skills even after school to enable them become successful employees. This aligns with the study made by Riebe, et al. (2010) that the university programme effectiveness in teaching the students about teamwork skills and other necessary skills create a mind-set and disposition among them on the necessity of the soft skills towards future employment. A university that uses light hand to handle soft skills development among lecturers and students will undoubtedly



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produce ambassadors who are so indifferent to such.

From the hypothesis one, it was shown that the difference in the perception of students and lecturers in soft skills required of business education graduates is statistically significant,  $t = 11.22$ ,  $df = 255$ ,  $p < 0.05$ . This implies that lecturers as educators are abreast of these soft skills more than the students who are the end users. This supports the findings of Emeasoba (2016) who succinctly affirmed that Business Education is a tripartite programme that prepares its recipient for the world of work both as a business studies teacher, business office employee or employer of labour/entrepreneur. This implies that both business education teachers and graduates must be encompassed with a set of capabilities that will help them to meet with the current challenges in the world of work.

Findings from the hypothesis two showed that there was no statistical significant difference in the perception of students and lecturers in soft skills required of business education graduates based on institutions. Tang (2018) stated that hard skills alone are insufficient to achieve organizational goals and objectives. Since employees will be involved in different leadership and decision-making positions. For these reasons, acquisition of soft skills is germane in this 21<sup>st</sup> century for any organisation or institution to achieve its stated goals and objectives. These soft skills include: communication soft skills, teamwork, analytical thinking, problem solving, leadership skills and time management

### Conclusion

Students and lecturers have good perception on the required soft skills for graduates of business education. However, there is a wide gap in the knowledge of the soft skills between students and lecturers as the lecturers have proven it over and over again in their workplaces. Also, the standard at which students are being introduced to the nitty and gritty of soft skills for future employability is relatively not the same across institutions. Some institutions give proper credence and attention to this than others.

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### Recommendations

From the foregoing, the following are recommended:

1. Students should be encouraged to develop the requisite soft skills that will help them in the labour market after graduation from school, bearing in mind the competition that exist in securing an employment.
2. There should be an overhauling of business education curriculum in all the institutions to ensure absolute uniformity in the acquisition of soft skills that will prepare business education graduates for world of work.
3. Lecturers are expected to engage their students in certain activities that enable them to make critical decisions and proffer solutions to critical issues. In essence, students should be exposed to the pragmatic and practical aspect of soft skills and not confined to the conventional method of head knowledge.
4. The study found that students should have a proper disposition to embrace not only the cognitive domain of learning but also see the need to pursue other things that will properly place them above peers and give them an apparent edge when they eventually become graduates.

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