

ASSESSMENT OF ACCOUNTING COMPETENCIES POSSESSED BY BUSINESS EDUCATION GRADUATES FOR HANDLING ENTREPRENEURSHIP CHALLENGES IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The increasing cases of inability of business education graduates to adequately apply accounting competencies in their places of employment and in managing businesses in Abia State informed the need for this study, to assess the accounting competencies possessed by business education graduates for handling entrepreneurship challenges. The purpose of the study was to ascertain the extent business education graduates possess competencies in management and cost accounting. Two research questions guided the study while two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study comprised 105 private employers of business education graduates. A 36-item questionnaire tagged Accounting Competencies for Handling Entrepreneurship Challenges (ACHEC) was used for data collection. The questionnaire has 5-point rating scale. Internal consistency of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha and it yielded an alpha value of 0.82 for all the clusters. Two experts in Business education and one expert in Educational Measurement and Evaluation validated the instrument. Data collected for the study in respect of the research questions were analysed using mean and standard deviation while z-test was used to test the null hypotheses. Findings from the study revealed that business education graduates possessed management and cost accounting competencies to a moderate extent. Based on the findings, it was recommended that Business educators should adopt learner-centered method of teaching to engage the students more in problem-solving activities in management and cost accounting courses to enable them acquire the required competencies to a high extent and be able to apply them in their places of work and business. Again, Business education students should be encouraged to register for professional programme in accounting courses to help them improve on their accounting skills. Also, Business education students while in school should be encouraged to

KEYWORDS: assessment, accounting competencies, business education, entrepreneurship challenges

1. INTRODUCTION

The demand for education all over the world is derived. This is so because education is not needed by individuals for its own sake but for what it helps the recipients to achieve or become in the society. Education is the process of teaching an

individual to acquire knowledge, skills and attitude needed to be functional in the society. Education is an instrument for achieving national socio-economic development as it helps individuals to discover their potentials, fan them to flame and apply same in solving societal problems. One of such problems that is eating deep into the fabric of most developing countries in the world is the astronomical increase in unemployment among youths. Business education is one of the educational programmes that serve as an antidote to unemployment as it equips students with the necessary skills, knowledge and attitude to become self-reliant by establishing and managing their own businesses profitably without the businesses going into extinction in foreseeable future time. In view of the comprehensive nature of business education curriculum, it is expected that upon graduation, its graduates would adequately satisfy the manpower requirement of the public and private sectors of the economy in the business world, become globally competitive entrepreneurs and employers of labour through the establishment of small and medium-scale businesses, among others. But as against the expected, it seems that reverse is the case.

Observations and literature have shown that business education graduates in Nigeria often experience business failure and many of the businesses set up by them collapse within their first five years of existence. Some smaller percentage goes into extinction between the sixth and tenth year of their establishment, while only about five to ten percent of such young firms survive, thrive and grow to maturity (Aremu & Adeyemi, 2011). This observed frequent collapse of small and medium scale businesses in Nigeria is a sufficient proof that practitioners seem to lack relevant competencies for effective entrepreneurship (Ezenwafor, 2010). A study by Okoro (2013) revealed that business education postgraduate students are not competent in preparation of tax codes and setting up of currency in business management. Private employers of labour on their own part persistently complain about business education graduates' lack of accounting competencies for success in their work (Akanisi, 2012). Unemployment and loss of capital have continued to rise unabated among business education graduates due to perceived inability of them to use accounting competencies to handle entrepreneurship challenges. The society has been denied the much desired benefit of business education programme as the products cannot adequately and meaningfully contribute to the economic and social growth of the society (Gaius-Okeh, Chinakwe & Njoku, 2013).

The alarming unemployment rate and massive failure of businesses set up by Business education graduates on the grounds of their inability to manage and continue in the business for a long time necessitated this study. Abia State is a commercial State, there are many private businesses in places like Aba, Umuahia, Ohafia, among others. Many business education graduates and others in this area often establish their own businesses upon graduation but the worry is that most of these businesses fail after a very short time yet while the literature is replete with studies on the accounting competencies for successful management of businesses, no study was found to have assessed the extent business education graduates in Abia State possess management and cost accounting competencies for handling entrepreneurship challenges, hence, the need for this study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Accounting Competencies

According to Ekwe and Abuka (2014), accounting competency is the capacity and knowledge required in preparing accounting records. Accounting competencies are those competencies in accounting required by a person to function competently, confidently and successfully in the process of carrying out the function of recording daily business transactions (Onoh in Etifit, Eminue & Udoh, 2016). Examples of accounting competencies include skills in proper book-keeping, purchasing and supply, pricing, determining labour costs, budgeting, variance analysis, preparation of end-of-year financial statements, keeping customers' records and inventory control, etc. Others are skills in good credit facility practices, prudent financial and working capital management. A study carried out by Eze, Ezenwanfor and Igberaharha (2016), revealed that accounting skills are needed to a high extent by business education graduates for successful entrepreneurship.

Oyesode in Etifit, Eminue and Udoh (2016) maintained that no business activity could be successfully operated without the possession of accounting skills by the entrepreneur or manager. Persistent drastic changes in the business world caused by changes in technology, business complexities and globalization have placed much demand on business education graduates and indeed all operators of small and medium-scale businesses to acquire accounting competencies to a high extent in line with global accounting practices (Seedwell, 2015). This phenomenon thus brings a myriad of daunting challenges in managing small, medium and large-scale businesses profitably. Consequently, possession of accounting competencies to a high extent becomes necessary for handling these increasing entrepreneurship challenges.

2.2 Entrepreneurship Challenges

Entrepreneurship challenges are conditions that make successful business management difficult and thus require the application of diverse creative abilities, competencies and knowledge in different areas of business, by an entrepreneur and his employees in order to provide lasting solution to the seemingly difficult situations that threaten the success of the business. Extant studies have shown that the contemporary business environment requires people with specialist knowledge or knowledge specialists who can be able to handle these entrepreneurship challenges well (Howieson, 2003; Jackling & De Lange, 2009). Entrepreneurship challenges include stiff competition, rising inflation, difficulties in forecasting demand and supply of goods, increase in cost of capital or interest rate, low turnover, low profit, inadequate infrastructure, frequent change of economic policies, among others. One of such creative abilities that business education graduates need to bring to bear in handling business challenges in their businesses or place of employment is accounting competency.

Business education is one of the educational programmes that imbue students with functional skills, attitudes and knowledge necessary for effective participation in the world of work within business and for self-employment. It is this utilitarian nature of business education that qualifies it as vocational education program. Ntukidem (2012) asserted that Business education has a definite role in preparing and equipping students with skills that increase their chances of finding jobs across territorial boundaries after schooling. Atakpa (2011) remarked that business education is an embodiment of vocational knowledge and skills needed for employment and advancement in a broad range of business careers.

2.3 Business education

Gidado and Akaeze in Wagbara and Ubulom (2017) conceptualized business education as education for business and about business, which can make a beneficiary to function well as an entrepreneur. This is due to the fact that it equips the recipients with skills which are needed to manage businesses successfully in the business world. The content of Business education curriculum is such that equips its recipients with competencies in accounting. Some of the accounting courses in business education curriculum include financial accounting, cost accounting, management accounting, taxation and auditing. The inclusion of all these accounting courses is to adequately equip business education graduates with accounting competencies necessary for handling entrepreneurship challenges and to promote the survival of business enterprises they would float upon graduation. Supporting, Ezeani (2012) maintained that possession of accounting competencies by entrepreneurs or business education graduates will help to reduce the rate at which small-scale businesses go into liquidation. The author further maintained that the knowledge acquired from the study of accounting courses will enable these graduates to secure employment in various sectors of the economy, both in private and public organization.

Some business education graduates have their own private businesses as means of livelihood while others who have no capital to set up their businesses are under the employment of entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs or private employers are individuals who own and manage their personal businesses as a source of sustaining livelihood and to create employment opportunities for others. This group of people complements the government's effort in providing employment for many Nigerian youths and graduates who cannot readily find white collar jobs in the public sector.

Given the prevailing unemployment situation among graduates in Nigeria, entrepreneurship has become necessary as it helps graduates and others to create jobs for themselves and others instead of seeking for white collar jobs that are in acute supply (Allawadi, 2010). In an attempt to promote entrepreneurship among graduates and reduce unemployment, the Federal government in 2007 mandated Universities to offer a compulsory entrepreneurship course for all students before graduation. The rationale for this policy is to inculcate entrepreneurial competencies into graduates to enable them start their own businesses upon graduation, irrespective of their course of study. However, despite the efforts of government at all levels in promoting entrepreneurship and the inclusion of various accounting courses in the business education curriculum, business education graduates still seem not to be able to handle entrepreneurship challenges to avoid business failure. Cory and Pruske, (2012) noted that the dissatisfaction with the skills and knowledge demonstrated by graduates entering the workforce has been of concern by employers for a number of years. Research reports showed that business graduates still have problems in tackling business challenges successfully (Fatemeh, Maryam & Zahra, 2013; Cory & Pruske, 2012). Kermis and Kermis (2010) contend that the business education students need to acquire accounting skills and other necessary skills to a high extent in order to be successful in managing businesses.

Many cases of business failures abound. Thus, instilling fears in fresh business education graduates who now resort to seeking white-collar jobs which are difficult to come by. This situation accounts for the increase in unemployment among business education graduates. The problem is not setting up a business but how to manage it successfully without the business

liquidating in the foreseeable future time. For instance, US Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy in Regina and Onwumere (2010) revealed that in a developed country like the United States of America (USA), 56% of new businesses fail to survive in their first three years in existence and 69% fail by the end of their sixth year. Similarly, in his study, Akume (2006) revealed that many graduates that set up their businesses experience high rate of failure. Akume further stated that within a year, about 50% of such businesses survive; in two years, about 18% of them survive, while in three years, many of them have liquidated.

This incessant business failures and its consequent loss of capital by business education graduates is perhaps as a result of their inadequate possession of management and cost accounting competencies. Various studies of factors responsible for small business failure have identified poor accounting and financial management skills of the owners and managers (McMahon & Holmes, 2011; Berryman, 2009). Regina and Onwumere (2010) supported this by stating that there is strong evidence that businesses established and managed by Nigerian graduates (Business education graduates inclusive) are often afflicted by the same lack of accounting and financial management skills that bedevil other businesses. Similarly, Siti, Ahmed and Ridzwana (2018) expressed dissatisfaction that the quality of business education graduates is below employers' expectation and that their accounting skills seem not adequate to cope with the present dynamic business environment. Accounting competencies for successful entrepreneurship in this study is limited to management accounting and cost accounting competencies.

2.4 Management Accounting Competencies

Management accounting entails using cost data and records for taking management decisions. According to Egbunike (2014), management accounting is primarily concerned with gathering data, analyzing, processing, interpreting and communicating accounting information for use within the organization so that management can effectively plan, make decisions and control operations. ICAN, Ashfaq, Younas, Usman and Hanif in Oluyinka, Patrick, and Muyiwa (2016) stated that management accounting uses certain techniques such as standard costing, variance analysis, absorption costing, marginal costing, budgeting, cost volume profit analysis and process costing among others to provide information for managers as a basis for taking decisions regarding the business. Zahra (2011) stated that management accounting allows the business owner to stay in control of the business. Zahra reiterated that checking the bank balances of a business firm periodically does not constitute a good financial control but adequate management accounting practices according to Eugene and Miston (2017) permits firms to compete in the market place and reduce the likelihood of business failure. According to Aremu and Adeyemi (2011), Regina and Onwumere (2010), it seems that business education graduates do not attach much importance to the application of management accounting competencies in managing businesses, but are just interested in knowing the bank balance of their business and records of their debtors and sales made. In agreement, a study by Pavtar (2017) showed that operators of small and medium scale enterprises only keep sales and purchase daybook and that small and medium-scale enterprises are faced with challenges of accounting practices. Unless business education graduates and business owners can identify adverse operating trends and take actions to correct the situation, it may result in a severe cash shortfall in the business.

Khurram, Sohail, Muhammad and Zahid (2014) maintained that management accounting practices are very essential to the success of business organizations and regretted that these practices are not used in many business organizations. Similarly, Nandan in Idowu (2016) opined that failure rate of small and medium-scale enterprises has been traced to the underlying absence of management accounting skills and techniques, apart from the factors of poor financial accounting, non-access to finance, poor financial management practices and poor adoption of technology. According to Christina (2013), there is a rapid change of business environment into global, competitive and turbulent business environment. These changes pose significant challenges to any type of corporation, manufacturing or non-manufacturing company, big, medium or small company and either profit-oriented or non-profit oriented company. Thus, possession of management accounting competencies to a high extent by business education graduates and indeed all entrepreneurs becomes imperative for them to be able handle these challenges successfully.

Adela, Mihaela and Andra (2013) noted that management accounting provides sufficient information to detect positive and adverse trends in sales volumes, operating margins, cost and profit. Importantly, this information will be available throughout the trading year and allow for informed business decisions to be taken. The authors however observed that management accounting is superficially treated by most economic entities, especially small and medium-scale enterprises. Without a thorough understanding and preparation of management accounts, business education graduates cannot be certain of the results to be obtained in their decision-making process.

In the opinion of the employers, to what extent do business education graduates possess competencies in management accounting for handling entrepreneurship challenges in Abia State?

Ho₁: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female private employers on the extent business education graduates possess management accounting competencies for handling entrepreneurship challenges in Abia State.

2.5 Cost Accounting Competencies

Cost accounting is the process of gathering data about the cost of products or services and the cost of activities. Cost accounting will show the Management how the business has fared at each stage of operation (Ezeagba, 2014). Cost accounting helps to ascertain, accumulate and control costs. In line with this, Institute of Cost and Management Accountant (ICMA) in Zahra (2011) described cost accounting as part of management accounting which establishes standard costs, actual cost of operation and the analysis of variance and profit. Horngren, Datar, Rajan and Ittner (2009) stated that success in any business from the smallest to the largest multi-national corporation requires the use of cost accounting. Umeji and Obi (2014) maintained that business organizations need cost accounting information to make informed decisions relating to what product to make or sell, how much profit or benefit that should be generated, cost price and selling price of items and to even identify items that are not profitable. Such decisions regarding cost, price, volume and profit are very critical as they determine the success or failure of a business organisation. Hence, the need to put in place a good cost accounting system that can provide reliable data for taking such decisions cannot be over-emphasised. Cost accounting competencies include skills in record-keeping, inventory control, price determination, stock valuation, continuous stock-taking, determination of critical stock levels, use of marginal and absorption costing techniques to determine unit cost of goods, application of target costing, application of activity-based costing, use of just-in-time method of production, cost allocation and apportionment, among others.

Possession of cost accounting competencies by business education graduates is necessary for preparation of budgets and pre-determination of cost of operation. This in turn helps them to constantly monitor and compare actual cost with the standard cost so as to take prompt corrective action when negative variance occurs. Cost analysis and budgets are quantitative plans that help to forecast and predict the future. When it is lacking, then the business is doomed to fail. Robert in Oyerogba, Olaleye and Solomon (2014) stated that a business organisation with adequate cost structure has the higher chance of attaining its profit target. Also, possession of cost accounting competency helps operators of businesses to apply target costing in order to manage the business profitably in a competitive market place (Zengin & Ada in Olabisi & Dafe, 2014). Target costing is a proactive cost planning, cost management, and cost reduction practice whereby costs are planned and managed at product design and development cycles, rather than during the latter stages of product development and production (Olabisi & Dafe, 2014). The thrust of target costing is to reduce cost from the product planning stage so that the price of the product will not be relatively higher than other similar competitive products in the market.

Another important costing technique that requires cost accounting competency is activity-based costing. Activity-based costing is defined as the method of charging overhead to cost units on the basis of benefits received from a particular indirect activity ((Egbunike 2014). Activity-based costing helps to show the relationship between overhead costs and the activities that cause them. The application of activity-based costing by business education graduates in managing small businesses is of paramount importance. This is because it will help the graduates to provide a more realistic product costing, recognize the activities that cause product cost increment and to trace cost to processes, customers and areas of managerial responsibility. Despite the enormous benefits associated with activity-based costing, entrepreneurs seem not to apply it in managing their businesses. Hamide and Metin (2015) found that operators of small and medium-sized enterprises do not apply activity-based costing and just-in-time costing in managing their businesses.

Oyerogba, Olaleye and Solomon (2014) found that a positive significant relationship exists between cost accounting practices and firm's performance. The authors opined that a cost reduction strategy with emphasis on production overhead cost and administrative overhead cost should be embarked upon if their profit maximization and wealth creation objective must be achieved. Corroborating, Horngren and Sundem (2012) opined that it is axiomatic that the continuous existence of all business concerns depends on the efficient and effective practice of cost accounting. However, the authors decried that the cost accounting practice in the informal sector of Nigeria is not without criticism, and that the current state of cost accounting practice in the informal business sector in Nigeria appears inappropriate and ineffective. Supporting, Umeji and Obi (2014) revealed that cost accounting competencies such as record-keeping, inventory control and price determination

skills were perceived to be very important by the operators of small businesses, but the levels of possession of these competencies are still below expectation.

In the opinion of the employers, to what extent do business education graduates possess competencies in cost accounting for handling entrepreneurship challenges in Abia State?

Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female private employers on the extent business education graduates possess cost accounting competencies for handling entrepreneurship challenges in Abia State.

3. METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey design was adopted in this study. The descriptive survey research design was considered appropriate for this study since it is concerned with exploring the opinions of employers on the existing condition by the use of a questionnaire. The population for this study comprised 1,809 entrepreneurs of small and medium-scale enterprises whose businesses are registered by Abia State Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 87 entrepreneurs who are employers of Business education graduates. Structured questionnaire containing 22 items was used as instrument for data collection. The instrument had a 5-point response option of Very High Extent (5points), High Extent (4points), Moderate Extent (3points), Low Extent (2points) and Very Low Extent (1point). The face validity of the instrument was established using three experts. Two of the experts are in business education programme while one expert is in educational measurement and evaluation. The researcher effected the corrections pointed out by the validators before the final production and use of the instrument. Cronbach alpha method was used to establish the internal consistency of the instrument and it yielded alpha value of 0.82. The researcher personally administered the instrument directly to the respondents with the help of five research assistants. The data collected in respect of the research questions were analyzed using mean and standard deviation while z-test statistical tool was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Mean ratings of the items on the questionnaire were interpreted using real limit of numbers. Any item with mean score of 4.50 - 5.00 was regarded as being possessed to a very high extent, 3.5– 4.49 as high extent, 2.5–3.49 as moderate high extent, 1.5–2.49 as low extent and 0.5 –1.49 as very low extent.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Research Question 1

To what extent do Business education graduates possess competencies in management accounting for handling entrepreneurship challenges in Abia State?

Table 01: Mean ratings of private employers on the extent business education graduates possess competencies in management accounting for handling entrepreneurship challenges in Abia State.

		N = 87		
S/N	ITEMS	Mean	SD	Remarks
	Ability to:			
1.	Prepare budgets.	3.2	1.02	Moderate Ext.
2.	Avoid unbudgeted expenditure	4.0	0.97	High Extent
3.	Identify any arithmetical errors in the financial records.	4.5	0.95	Very High Ext.
4.	Design management control systems for comparing actuals against budget amounts, part year and full year figures to identify unusual items.	3.0	1.11	Moderate Ext.
5.	Interpret the impact of unusual figures identified by analytical review.	3.3	1.01	Moderate Ext.
6.	Review a schedule of financial data in order to identify unusual items	3.2	1.04	Moderate Ext.
7.	Perform variance analysis of cost of production.	3.1	1.02	Moderate Ext.
8.	Carry out cost-volume profit analysis for the business.	2.2	0.97	Low Extent
9.	Monitor and control expenditure	4.6	0.99	High Extent
10.	Analyse complex financial statements to identify trends using ratios, percentages and comparative figures.	2.4	1.02	Low Extent
11.	Contribute to the content of business plans.	3.7	0.93	High Extent
	Cluster Mean	3.38		Moderate Extent

Data in Table 01 shows that business education graduates possess management accounting competencies to a moderate extent. This is shown by the cluster mean of 3.38. The standard deviations are within the same range. This shows that private employers did not vary significantly in their opinions on the extent business education graduates possess competencies in financial accounting competencies.

4.2 Research Question 2

To what extent do business education graduates possess competencies in cost accounting for handling entrepreneurship challenges in Abia State?

Table 02: Mean ratings of private employers on the extent business education graduates possess competencies in cost accounting for handling entrepreneurship challenges in Abia State

N = 87				
S/N	ITEMS	Mean	SD	Remarks
	Ability to:			
12.	Use payback period technique for decision- making	3.8	0.96	High Extent
13.	Separate fixed costs from variable costs in the determination of unit cost of production.	3.2	1.05	Moderate Ext.
14.	Use learning curve technique to reduce overhead cost.	3.0	0.98	Moderate Ext.
15.	Adopt target costing practices in the production and supply of goods.	2.9	1.01	Moderate Ext.
16.	Apply Activity Based Costing (ABC) in the business.	3.0	1.09	Moderate Ext.
17.	Keep and control inventory.	4.2	0.89	High Extent
18.	Determine the critical stock levels of goods at all times.	3.0	0.99	Moderate Ext.
19.	Ensure continuous stock-taking.	3.9	0.87	High Extent
20.	Determine the unit cost of goods using marginal costing technique.	2.9	0.99	Moderate Ext.
21.	Determine unit cost of goods using absorption costing technique.	3.5	1.04	High Extent
22.	Carry out periodic stock valuation exercise.	4.0	1.03	High Extent
	Cluster Mean	3.40		Moderate Extent

Information on Table 02 reveals that business education graduates possess cost accounting competencies to a moderate extent. This is shown by the cluster mean of 3.40. The standard deviations are within the same range. This also shows that private employers did not vary significantly in their opinions on the extent business education graduates possess competencies in cost accounting competencies.

4.3 Results of Test of Hypotheses

4.3.1 Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female private employers on the extent business education graduates possess management accounting competencies for handling entrepreneurship challenges in Abia State. Data obtained in respect of hypothesis 1 were analyzed and presented in Table 03.

Table 03: Z-test of difference between the mean ratings of male and female private employers on the extent business education graduates possess management accounting competencies for handling entrepreneurship challenges in Abia State.

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Remarks
Male	54	3.78	1.07	85	1.73	1.96	NS
Female	33	3.33	1.23				

Data on Table 03 reveals that z-calculated value is 1.73 while z-critical value is 1.960 at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is therefore not rejected since z-calculated value is less than z-critical value. This implies that male and female private employers of business education graduates in Abia State did not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent business education graduates possess competencies in management accounting for handling entrepreneurship challenges.

4.3.2 Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female private employers on the extent business education graduates possess cost accounting competencies for handling entrepreneurship challenges in Abia State. Data obtained in respect of hypothesis 3 were analysed and presented in Table 04.

Table 04: Z-test of difference between the mean ratings of male and female private employers on the extent business education graduates possess cost accounting competencies for handling entrepreneurship challenges in Abia State

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Df	z-cal.	z-crit.	Remarks
Male	54	3.63	1.34	85	1.47	1.96	NS
Female	33	3.21	1.26				

Data on Table 04 shows that z-calculated value is 1.47 while z-critical value is 1.960 at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is not rejected since z-calculated value is less than z-critical value. This means that male and female private employers of business education graduates in Abia State did not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the extent business education graduates possess competencies in cost accounting for handling entrepreneurship challenges.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Discussion

Findings of the study showed that the extent of possession of management accounting competencies for handling entrepreneurship challenges by Business education graduates is moderate. This is shown by the cluster mean score of 3.38 which falls under moderate extent category of the response options. In other words, it means that their competency level in management accounting is average. This study also revealed major areas of lapses by Business education graduates in management accounting to include inability to carry out cost-volume-profit analysis for the business, inability to analyse complex financial statements to identify trends using ratios, percentages and comparative figures, inability to design management control systems for comparing actual cost against budgeted amounts, part year and full year figures to identify unusual figures, among others.

The z-test of the null hypothesis revealed that male and female employers were homogenous in their mean ratings of Business education graduates. The finding confirms previous studies by Gichaaga, (2013), Khrram, Sohail, Muhammad and Zahid, (2014) that operators of small and medium-scale enterprises rarely apply management accounting practices as expected due to lack of competence. Some of the operators of small businesses erroneously believe that the small size and nature of their business do not require the adoption of management accounting practices. This finding is also in line with the findings of Eugene and Miston (2017) that management account practices positively influence the business performance of small and medium scale enterprises. This implies that how well a business will perform in the competitive business world depends among other things, on the extent of management accounting competencies possessed by the entrepreneur. The finding is equally consistent with the findings of Idowu (2016) that there is moderate adoption of management accounting techniques related to cost accounting systems, planning, budgeting and control systems. While adoption of management accounting techniques in pricing policy and management reporting system is significantly low among operators of small and medium scale enterprises.

The business world today is fraught with stiff competition and complexities. Also the challenging nature of our economy keeps worsening every day. Hence, moderate possession of management accounting competencies is not enough to successfully manage small and medium-scale businesses and remain afloat. It requires entrepreneurs and business education graduates to be highly competent in management accounting in order to remain in business. Perhaps it is this moderate level of competency in management accounting that makes business education graduates unable to adequately handle the increasing entrepreneurship challenges in the present competitive global business world. This is the reason for the incessant business failure often experienced by most Business education graduates.

The finding also revealed that the extent of possession of cost accounting competencies for handling entrepreneurship challenges by Business education graduates is moderate. This is shown by the cluster mean score of 3.40 which falls under moderate extent category of the response options. The result further showed that Business education graduates are deficient in the application of target costing practices, activity-based costing, separation of fixed costs from variable costs in the determination of unit cost of production, use of learning curve technique to reduce overhead cost, determining the unit cost

of goods using marginal costing technique and in determining the critical stock levels of goods at all times for control purposes. The z-test analysis disclosed that the private employers irrespective of gender were homogenous in their mean ratings on the extent of possession of cost accounting competencies by business education graduates for handling entrepreneurship challenges. This finding is in line with the findings of Umeji and Obi (2014) that cost accounting skills and practices were perceived to be very important by the entrepreneurs (including business education graduates), but that the level of possession of these skills by them was still below expectation.

The findings of this study agree with the finding of Hamide and Metin (2015) who found that application of cost accounting techniques like activity-based costing by operators of small and medium-sized enterprises is not adequate due to lack of expert knowledge. Furthermore, Agara in Umeji and Obi (2014) revealed that stock control practices like determination of critical stock levels, continuous stock taking, stock valuation practices are often lacking among small and medium scale business owners, hence, their high rate of business failure. Also, finding of this study is in consonance with the report of Olabisi and Dafe (2014) who reported that target costing which is in aspect of cost accounting is perceived to be very important in enhancing sales and profitability of small and medium-scale enterprises but that its implementation among operators of small businesses is still at low ebb. The finding of this study also corroborates with the findings of Obara and Ukpai (2014) that operators (Business education graduates inclusive) of private businesses do not apply cost accounting practices in the management of their businesses due to lack of adequate knowledge. This informed their inability to carry out certain cost accounting functions effectively in the management of businesses and this hampers their effective handling of entrepreneurship challenges using expert knowledge in cost accounting.

5.2 Conclusion

Managing entrepreneurship challenges successfully is a herculean task. The success or failure of any small or medium-scale business will depend on the extent of competencies possessed by the operators. For Business education graduates to effectively and efficiently manage small and medium-scale businesses successfully, they must possess management and cost accounting competencies to a high extent. From the findings of this study, Business education graduates working in Abia State were rated moderate in their extent of possession of management and cost accounting competencies for handling entrepreneurship challenges by their employers. This could be a major reason for the incessant failure of businesses set up by Business education graduates and also informs the preference of accounting graduates to Business education graduates by employers for accounting-related jobs. Therefore, Business education students should show more interest and commitment to the learning of management and cost accounting competencies to enable them use the acquired competencies to do well in the world of work and business, upon graduation. Instructors on their own part should adopt students-centered approach to teaching in order to ensure that students acquire these competencies in higher degrees for application in managing businesses successfully. Acquisition of accounting competencies to a high extent by business education graduates will help them to set up their businesses, manage them successfully and remain in business for a long time without failure. Furthermore, it will help them to compete favourably with their accountancy counterparts in their places of work and in the global labour market.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- Business educators should adopt learner-centered method of teaching to engage the students more in problem-solving activities in management and cost accounting courses to enable them acquire the required competencies to a high extent and be able to apply them in their places of work and business.
- Business education students should be encouraged by their teachers and other stakeholders to register for professional programmes like ANAN, ICAN, etc. to help them improve on their accounting skills.
- Also, possession of O' level credit pass in accounting by intending business education students should be one of the requirements for admission of students into Business education programme in higher institutions of learning.

5.4 Limitations and future directions for Research

The content coverage of this research was limited to management and cost accounting competencies only. Other accounting competencies such as financial, risk management, taxation and auditing competencies were not covered in this work. Hence, further researches could be done in these areas in future. The population for this research comprised employers in the private sector while those in the public sector were not considered. This makes it imperative for similar research using

employers in the public sector as the population. Furthermore, the geographical scope of this research was limited to Abia State, Nigeria only. This type of research could be done in other States and geo-political zones in Nigeria where there are many small and medium-scale businesses.

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