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Professional and technological skills requirements of accounting graduates in Nigeria

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Abstract
This study investigated the professional and technological skills of accounting graduates in Nigeria. This was motivated by the call for review of accounting curriculum to meet changing business environment. Data obtained from 436 respondents drawn from Northeastern Nigeria were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Communication skills and computer application were found to be the most important professional skills for a successful career in accounting. Similarly, spreadsheet, database and presentation packages were most rated IT skills for a career in accounting profession. Public sector, cost and financial accounting were rated extremely important knowledge acquired to work relation tasks and responsibilities. The findings of this paper provide implication to policy makers on designing accounting curriculum in enhancing the quality of accounting graduates in Nigeria.

Keywords: Accounting graduates, curriculum, accounting profession, Nigeria

1.0 Introduction

Accounting education globally has been criticized for failing to meet the demands of the modern business environment due to outdated and irrelevant curriculum (Abayadeera & Watty, 2014, 2016; Awayiga, Onumah, & Tsamenyi, 2010; Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008). This has made various stakeholders including policymakers in education, professional accountants and researchers to raise concerns on the quality of accounting graduates (Awayiga et al., 2010; Carr, Chua, & Perera, 2007). Previous studies have indicated the relevance of technical and generic skills to the career success of accountants (Abayadeera & Watty, 2014). Although technical skills form the bedrock of an accounting career, their success depends on adaptive generic skills. In other words, accounting education should be able to provide skills in oral, written, interpersonal and organizational communication skills as well as technological skills (De Lange, Jackling, & Gut, 2006; Jackling & Lange, 2009). However, the current practice is that importance is placed on technical skills disregarding generic skills. Arguably, the current model of accounting education is unable to produce accounting graduates with the required skills to pursue a successful career. Consequently calling for changes in the accounting curriculum (Awayiga et al., 2010; Byrne & Flood, 2005). This has prompted several researchers to suggest changes to the accounting education curriculum. Carr et al., (2007) for example recommended the inclusion of skills, knowledge and professional orientation into accounting education. The aim is to offer a broad, general and high-quality liberal education that will deliver core technical and

generic skills in a challenging and intellectually stimulating way. In the design of an accounting curriculum, the perspectives of various stakeholders are important and incorporated to enhance the quality of accounting graduates (Carr et al., 2007). Along this line, previous studies have considered alumni (Carr et al., 2007), accounting graduates and employees (Awayiga et al., 2010; De Lange et al., 2006) as the significant stakeholder. The findings from these studies have suggested changes in the accounting curriculum to incorporate generic skills in addition to technical skills (Awayiga et al., 2010; De Lange et al., 2006). However, the majority of the studies are conducted in the US (De Lange et al., 2006), Sri Lanka (Abayadeera & Watty, 2016) Ghana (Awayiga et al., 2010) and Australia (Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008). Thus, emphasizing the need for research on specific developing countries like Nigeria. The Bench Mark for Academic Standard (BMAS) currently in used was approved in 2012 by Nigeria Universities Commission (NUC). However, a new version was circulated to Universities in 2017 and there is no official record, to the best of our knowledge, on its approval. Current accounting education and the skill levels of accountants in Nigeria are therefore not in line with what is required in the dynamic environments of global business. Nigerian universities are producing accounting graduates with outdated skills making them irrelevant to modern business environments. Following the identification of the gap, this study aims to examine accounting graduates' and employers' perceptions on accounting knowledge and skills requirements in Nigeria. In achieving this objective, the current paper is divided into four sections. The next section will review the literature on the subject matter. Section three will be devoted to the methodology used in achieving this objective. Findings will be presented in section four. The paper will end with discussion and conclusion.

Literature Review:

Accounting education globally has been under scrutiny by policymakers, educators, researchers, practitioners, and the public largely due to a decline in the quantity and quality of accounting graduates as well as identified deficiencies in the curriculum of accounting programs (Carr et al., 2007). Furthermore, there is increasing demand for public accountability and transparency in governance and stewardship. It is therefore not surprising to see the increased support for a stakeholder approach in the design of the accounting curriculum. This emphasizes the roles played by accreditation agencies, professional organizations, faculty members and the general public.

Previous studies have examined the roles of stakeholders in the design of the accounting curriculum (Carr et al., 2007; De Lange et al., 2006; Jackling & Lange, 2009). For example, Carr et al., (2007) ascertain the views of alumni in the design of the accounting curriculum. Similarly, Churyk and Francisco, (2013) collected the views of intern students, employers and alumni on the effectiveness of the accounting curriculum. In another study, Wells et al., (2009) gathered responses from graduates of accountancy employed in public practice and from their workplace supervisors about teaching and learning deficiencies in accounting education. Furthermore, Kavanagh and Drennan, (2008) examined the perceptions and expectations of accounting students and their employers on the required skills of accounting graduates. In addition, Jackling and Lange, (2009) and Lange et al., (2006) used accounting

students and their employers to investigates the emphasis placed on technical and generic skills developed during undergraduate accounting courses.

It is therefore clear that previous studies have used students, interns, alumni, graduates and employers as respondents. It was also evident that these studies used one, two or three of the identified stakeholders. However, none of these studies have combined all the identified stakeholders in one study. In addition, two important stakeholders were excluded from the studies. These are faculty members and professional accountants in public practice. This study therefore identified this important gap in the previous studies. This is because the roles of this stakeholder are very important in the design of the accounting curriculum.

The majority of the published studies on accounting education and curriculum have originated from developed countries with few from developing countries (Awayiga et al., 2010). However, there seems to be a lack of study on this subject in the Nigerian context. This has necessitated the conduct of this study. In Nigeria, the National Universities Commission (NUC), is empowered to produce the minimum standards for all programs taught in Nigerian universities. The first Minimum Academic Standard was developed in 1989 and an amendment process was initiated in 2001 which led to its adoption of a new document known as the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) in 2007. Another version was developed and approved in 2012 and has been in use since then. However, a new version was circulated to Universities in 2017 and there is no official record, to the best of our knowledge, on its approval. There is therefore a dire need to collect the views of students, graduates, lecturers and employers on expected knowledge, attitudes and skills for graduates and their ability to fit into the requirements of the new national and global economy.

Accounting graduates are expected to acquire generic and technical skills during their undergraduate programs. Ehab and Sherif (2003) and Lange et al., (2006) listed seven skills accounting graduates should have in discharging their responsibilities. The listed skills are – (1) communication and interpersonal skills, (2) computer and related skills, (3) analytical skills, (4) multi-disciplinary skills, (5) knowledge of global issues, (6) personal qualities and (7) critical thinking. In addition, Awayiga et al., (2010) argued that accounting graduates were found to poses the technical knowledge but lack the generic skills needed for career success. The authors further discussed the skills deficiencies to include communication, intellectual, interpersonal, technical and business management skills. Others include information technology and general knowledge.

Awayiga et al., (2010) examined the professional and IT skills required of accounting graduates in Ghana and reported that analytical and critical thinking, spreadsheet and accounting packages were considered the most important professional skills and IT skills required of accounting graduates. On the other hand, De Lange et al., (2006) examined the emphasis place on technical and generic skills of accounting graduates. The study aimed to identify deficiencies in the current accounting program. The study reported that communication and analytical skills are considered the most important technical skills with observed deficiencies in oral and interpersonal and computing skills. They emphasized greater attention to generic skills for career success. Similarly,

Abayadeera and Watty, (2014) investigated the importance of generic skills for a successful career in accounting and found that the majority of the skills are not inculcated in accounting graduates.

Previous studies have found that accounting graduates are better equipped with technical skills but lack sufficient generic skills (Jackling & Lange, 2009; Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008; Wells et al., 2009). The deficiencies are found in teamwork, interpersonal and communication skills despite the established link between these skills and career success (Abayadeera & Watty, 2014). The relevance of generic skills has also been reported by Oussi and Klibi, (2017) due to a change in the role of accountants from score-keepers, bean counters and corporate cops to a more strategic role in organizations where oral and written communication are topmost priorities. They further argued that accounting students are not aware of additional needs for generic skills and that employees are generally not satisfied with skills required of accounting graduates thereby calling for an improvement in the development of these skills. These are briefly described as is obtainable from the literature.

Communication skills

Several studies have emphasized the relevance of communication skills in accounting graduates for a successful career (Awayiga et al., 2010; De Lange et al., 2006; Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008; Oussi & Klibi, 2017). This is because it forms the basis upon which accountants can receive and report information through oral and written presentations and defend such presentations with ease (Awayiga et al., 2010). They provide the aptitude for accounting graduates to competent communicators (Oussi & Klibi, 2017). It encompasses the ability to present, discuss and effectively defend ideas with ease and effectively listen, locate, retrieve, manipulate and use information from different sources in achieving organizational objectives. These skills when included in the curriculum will offer students the competencies for a successful professional career (Mandilas & Kourtidis, 2014).

Intellectual skills

Another generic skill that is ranked topmost skill required of accounting graduates is intellectual skills (Awayiga et al., 2010). It is concerned with problem-solving and decision-making skills (Wells et al., 2009). Abayadeera and Watty, (2016) opined that there exists a gap in the intellectual skills of accounting graduates. The challenge to accounting educators is to develop a curriculum that will offer these skills to accounting graduates. This is because the objective of accounting education is to provide the needed skills that will improve the competencies in the accounting graduate for a successful career in accounting (Carr et al., 2007). Accordingly, Awayiga et al., (2010) posit that accounting requires intellectual skills to be able to solve a diverse problem through the exercise of judgment in unfamiliar settings using comprehension of unfocused facts as well as the ability to apply inductive value-based reasoning to solve ethical questions and adoption to innovations.

Interpersonal skills

Kavanagh and Drennan, (2008) reported that one of the top-rated skills required of an accountant is interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills, according to Awayiga et al., (2010) are the ability to work and interact with others by influencing, motivating, and organizing them to achieve organizational objectives. It also involves the delegation of duties and resolving

conflicts through the assumption of leadership responsibilities. Therefore the development of accounting graduates must consider the inculcation of these skills (Abayadeera & Watty, 2014; De Lange et al., 2006; Wells et al., 2009). An ideal accounting program must include interpersonal skills (Carr et al., 2007).

Technical and functional skills

There is a general opinion that accounting graduate poses the technical skills relating to numeracy and IT, decision modeling, measurement, risk analysis and compliance with legislative requirements (De Lange et al., 2006; Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008). The relevance of IT skills has also been emphasized for inclusion into accounting programs (De Lange et al., 2006). These skills have also been ranked higher because it provides the foundation for accounting career (De Lange et al., 2006). Consequently, Hossain, Alam and Alamgir, (2019) posit that for employability purposes, educators must develop the technical skills set of the accounting graduates alongside the generic skills.

Personal skills

Apart from interpersonal and technical skills, accounting graduates are expected to acquire personal skills. These are related to their attitude and general behavior such as self-management, ability to select and assign priorities as well influence and self-leaning (Awayiga et al., 2010). Others include critical thinking, the ability to adapt to change, organize tasks to meet deadlines and self-motivation (Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008). De Lange et al., (2006) have also emphasized the relevance of moral reason as part of personal skills in addition to the ability to make ethical decisions. Employers are anticipating accounting graduates to be 'job read' (Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008).

Organizational and business management skills

Organizational and business management skills have evolved largely due to changes in the global outlook, IT and international standards. Understanding of business and global outlook, as well as political awareness, are key skills accounting graduates must possess. Awayiga et al., (2010) opined that for a successful career in accounting, an accounting graduate must have knowledge of strategic planning, human resource management, leadership and professional judgment. This will able them to organize tasks and delegate responsibilities in achieving the goals of the organization.

IT skills

The fast changes nature of IT has influenced many professions including accountancy with many of its functions changed through IT and hence the need to acquire knowledge of IT systems (Al-hattami, 2021). However, the identified slow nature of changes to the accounting curriculum has created a visible gap in skills acquired and required of accounting graduates. Al-hattami, (2021) opined that the inability of accounting educators to address the gap negatively affects the work-readiness of accounting graduates. Changes in accounting curriculum should be able to provide knowledge and skills in the use of IT and computing skills especially in word processing, spreadsheet and other accounting and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) packages (Awayiga et al., 2010; De Lange et al., 2006). The importance attached to IT is caused by advancement in business practices, large data management, communication and the need for an efficient business process (De Lange et al., 2006). The move to a digital economy and its uniqueness has changed the

skills expected of accounting graduates and the accounting curriculum should be flexible and reviewed continuously to reflect these needs (Al-hattami, 2021).

This current study will be built on the existing literature by collecting perceptions and expectations regarding these and other identifiable skills in the course of the research exercise. This is in line with the previous approach adopted by the NUC in developing the current BMAS which sought to gather information on expected knowledge, attitudes and skills for graduates and their ability to fit into the requirements of the new national and global economy.

Research method

This study examined the perception of accounting graduates and employers on professional and technological skills of accounting graduates in Nigeria. In so doing, the study adopts a mixed method through questionnaire administration, interviews and focus group discussions. The first phase of data collection involved face – to – face interviews and focus group discussion with participants purposively chosen from government Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), Accounting firms, Banks and the academia. The participants were chosen based on their experience and ability to provide accurate and reliable information. In all fourteen (14) interviews were conducted with participants from banks (4), accounting firms (2), public sector (5) and faculty members (3). In addition, a focus group discussion was conducted. A semi structured interview guide was used in the first phase of the data collection. The interviews and focus group discussion were all electronically recorded, with the consent of the participants, transcribed and analyzed qualitatively to extract views, perception and opinions on professional and technological skills of accounting graduate in relation to work-related tasks.

The questionnaire used for the study was adopted, with minor refinements to the Nigerian context and to include areas identified by subject experts, from the previous study (Awayiga et al., 2010). The questionnaire is divided into five sections. The first section, titled 'demographic information' gathered information to profile the respondents concerning their gender, qualification, employment position and industry. The target population is accounting graduates, finance directors/supervisors, professional accountants and faculty members.

The second and third sections sought to collect information on the importance of professional and technological skills respectively. Using a scale of 5 points (1= not important and 5 = extremely important), respondents were asked to rate the importance of 9 professional and technological skills considered significant for a successful career in accounting. The perception of knowledge acquires is covered under section D of the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to rate, on a scale of 5 points (1= not important and 5 = extremely important), the importance of knowledge acquired to work-related tasks.

The last two (2) sections solicited information on areas not covered during the degree program and general assessment respectively. The perception of the respondents on content coverage was rated on a five-point scale (1 = not covered and 5 = highly covered) while the general assessment of the skills of accounting graduate in organizational and business knowledge, accounting, finance and auditing and information technology were rated on a five-point scale (1 = very bad and 5 = very good). Data collected were analyzed using

SPSS. The current study is descriptive in nature and seeks to extract contextual information. Therefore, the statistical technique used for the current study is descriptive statistics.

Results and discussion

The current section is devoted to the presentation of results of analysis of data collected through questionnaire administration. A total of 600 questionnaires were personally administered to accounting graduates and their supervisors in the public sector, universities, accounting firms and financial institutions. This was done with the help of research assistants. The process took about three months. However, after several attempts to get the questionnaires, only 346 questionnaires were returned and considered usable for this study giving us a response rate of 58%. This is considered adequate as representative of the population (Awayiga et al., 2010; De Lange et al., 2006). The profile of our respondents' shows that males constitute 86% with a majority (78%) employed in the public sector. In addition, 216 of the valid responses are found in the middle-level cadre of management.

Table 1: Profile of respondents

	Number	**Percentage %**
Male	298	86
Female	48	14
Public sector	269	78
Private sector	77	23
Senior level	130	38
Middle level	216	62

Professional skills

Studies have emphasized the importance of professional skills to career success in accounting (Abayadeera & Watty, 2014; Awayiga et al., 2010; Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008). We asked our respondents to rate 14 items they considered are significant professional skills for career success in accounting. Table 2 presents the results of the descriptive statistics. The result of the analysis shows that communication and computing skills are rated high with a mean of 4.03 and 4.01 respectively on a five-point Likert scale. Similarly, personal, analytical and critical thinking skills were rated third most important skills for professional development in accounting. This is also consistent with our interviews and focus group discussions with the research participants. The participants emphasized that a successful career in accounting at both private and public sector demands the ability to communicate effectively in oral and written form. Computer literacy featured prominently in discussion with the participants arguing that without the knowledge of computer application accountants will be irrelevant in financial institutions, private firms and even in public sector. In their views, these becomes necessary as organization are now moving from manual to computerized accounting system. Our result is consistent with previous studies of Awayiga et al., (2010), De Lange et al., (2006) and Kavanagh and Drennan (2008) who reported that communication and computing skills are the most important professional skills for a successful career in the accounting profession. On the other hand, professional demeanor, technical and functional skills were considered the least important professional skills for a successful career in accounting.

In analogy, in the design of the accounting curriculum, emphasis must be placed on these generic skills to reflect multidisciplinary programs (Abayadeera & Watty, 2016). Communication skills enable

the accounting graduate to effectively pass on information in both oral and written forms for informed decisions. The relevance of this skill to career success in accounting has been demonstrated in our findings and similar studies (Abayadeera & Watty, 2014, 2016; Awayiga et al., 2010; Carr et al., 2007). Similarly, the trend on computer application in the business process has created the need for accounting graduates to have better knowledge of application packages to be able to deliver effectively. Furthermore, developing personal, interpersonal and critical thinking skills for the accounting graduates have been emphasized by the rating made by our respondents. Thus, the accounting program must be designed to reflect these needs for a successful career in accounting.

Table 2: Professional skills

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Communication Skills	346	4.03	1.185
Computing technology	346	4.01	1.087
Personal skills	346	3.97	1.031
Analytical and Critical thinking	346	3.97	1.181
Interpersonal skills	346	3.95	1.055
Intellectual skills	346	3.85	1.073
Organizational and Management skills	346	3.85	1.215
Technical and functional skills	346	3.72	1.385
Professional demeanor	346	3.67	1.190
Valid N (listwise)	346		

Technological skills

The growing relevance of IT skills in every aspect of human life has continued to influence all professions including accountancy. Specifically, with the expansion of computer and software developments, business transaction processing has changed significantly requiring accountants to possess additional skills. These skills include computer knowledge and work-related software skills (Hossain et al., 2019). Using a scale of 1 = not important to 5 = extremely important, respondents were asked to rate the importance of nine (9) IT skills that are considered essential for a successful accounting career. Our result in table 3 shows that spreadsheet application is ranked the most important IT skill for career success in accounting. Database package and presentation software as second and third most important skills. The respondents rated windows and e-commerce low. Although, there are variations in the views expressed by our research participants, the majority are of the view that every accounting must be able to at least use Microsoft Excel. However, application packages such as QuickBooks, Sage and other accounting software are added advantage for a successful career in accounting as argued in the focus-group discussion. This result agrees with that of Awayiga et al., (2010), Hossain et al., (2019), and Abayadeera and Watty, (2014) who both reported that computer competence and accounting software are essential skills for modern-day accounting practice. Thus, emphasis must be placed on the development of these competencies by accounting educators to meet employer needs as reported by similar studies in developing countries (Al-hattami, 2021; Asonitou & Hassall, 2019). Hence the need to have a responsive curriculum development (Ameyaw, Turnhout, Arts, & Wals, 2017).

Table 3: Technological skills

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Spreadsheet package	346	4.14	.927
Database Package	346	4.12	1.125
Presentation software	346	4.08	1.192
Technology management and budget	346	3.99	1.131
World Wide Web	346	3.99	1.133
Word-processing package	346	3.91	1.171
Communication software	346	3.80	1.182
E-commerce	346	3.76	1.182
Windows	346	3.68	1.014
Valid N (listwise)	346		

Knowledge acquired

In Nigeria, the accounting degree program is a four-year program aimed to train accountants for possible employment and self-development. In so doing, lectures are delivered to students in a semester system, examinations administered and results graded. We were able to extract 14 major areas from the accounting curriculum approved by the NUC.

The result, as contained in table 4, shows all the areas are important as shown by their mean (m>3.5). Public sector, cost and financial accounting were rated first, second and third. The analysis of the interview transcript also shows that the major useful knowledge acquired were in financial and public sector accounting as well as auditing and taxation. They argued that these knowledge are still applicable in work-related task and considered very useful for a successful career. In other words, they are considered the most important knowledge acquired during the degree program. This is similar to the finding of Awayiga et al., (2010) who reported a higher rating to the cost and financial accounting as well as public sector accounting. Other higher ratings as shown in table 4 include computer application, auditing and taxation. However, marketing, business policy and social sciences were rated low when compared to other areas.

Table 4: Knowledge acquired

	No.	Mean	Std. Deviation
Public sector accounting	346	4.15	1.105
Cost and Financial accounting	346	4.07	1.198
Public administration	346	4.04	1.029
Computer applications	346	3.98	1.119
Economics	346	3.95	1.186
Auditing	346	3.95	1.159
Taxation	346	3.91	1.134
Financial management and investment	346	3.90	1.169
Business communication	346	3.88	1.228
Commercial and company law	346	3.81	1.113
Quantitative methods	346	3.77	1.112
Business policy	346	3.69	1.336
Social sciences	346	3.69	1.330
Marketing	346	3.51	1.209
Valid N (listwise)	346		

Level of coverage of important areas

A fundamental role of an accounting education program is to train accountants to meet the need of employers and self-development through a skills development

program that will enhance their competencies to pursue a professional career in accounting. However, there exists a skills gap between the knowledge acquired and job requirements (Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008). Along with this finding, we asked our respondents to rate 21 important areas their perception of coverage. Using a scale of 1 = not covered to 5 = highly covered, respondents rated these areas and are presented in table 5.

The results of the responses in Table 5 shows that corporate governance, communication skills, taxation and leadership were highly covered areas out of the 21 mentioned areas. In addition, management accounting, organizational behavior and computer application were moderately covered. However, accounting-related issues, decision analysis and logic were ranked low in terms of coverage. This result is not surprising as the coverage differs from university to university as well as lecturers and programs of study. Consequently, these areas need to be incorporated in the accounting curriculum and quality control measures be put in place to ensure coverage.

Table 5: Areas not covered

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Business ethics and corporate governance	346	3.74	1.341
Report writing and communication skills	346	3.73	1.272
Taxation/tax management and planning	346	3.72	1.189
Leadership skills	346	3.71	1.147
Management accounting	346	3.67	1.275
Organizational behavior	346	3.64	1.105
Computer skills/spreadsheet applications/business information management	346	3.57	1.231
Presentation and professional outlook	346	3.55	1.267
Financial management	346	3.50	1.322
Case studies	346	3.50	1.252
International accounting	346	3.49	1.190
Business plan writing	346	3.49	1.214
Strategic business management	346	3.46	1.179
Accounting information systems/accounting software training	346	3.43	1.326
Entrepreneurship and SME's management	346	3.34	1.152
Foreign currency transactions	346	3.32	1.224
International business	346	3.31	1.368
Corporate Finance	346	3.29	1.252
Philosophy (logic)	346	3.27	1.161
Decision Analysis	346	3.21	1.228
Internet research on accounting related issues	346	3.16	1.314
Valid N (listwise)	346		

General assessment

The concluding part of the questionnaire was designed to capture the general assessment of the skills accounting graduate have concerning 4 major areas. We asked our respondents to rate the skills of the accounting grades in terms of general knowledge; organizational and business knowledge; accounting, finance and auditing and information technology. Using a five-point scale of 1 = very bad to 5 = very good, respondents assessed their skills in terms of these aforementioned areas. The result is presented in table 6.

Table 6: General assessment

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Accounting, finance and auditing knowledge	346	4.15	1.086
Information technology knowledge	346	4.08	1.099
Organizational and business knowledge	346	4.05	1.105
General knowledge	346	4.01	1.075
Valid N (listwise)	346		

The result in table 6 shows that accounting, finance and auditing knowledge is rated very good with a mean of 4.15. Our interview session also indicates that the graduates are generally very good in accounting related areas as well as coping well in technology applications. This may be connected with their roles as accountants, managers, directors of finance or background as accounting lecturers. Information technology and organization knowledge were also rated high while general knowledge was considered low. However, all the areas are considered good as shown in their means. This was a similar finding to the previous study (Awayiga et al., 2010).

Conclusion

The accounting program aims to develop skills necessary for a successful career in the accounting profession. Over the years there has been a general call to review the way universities develop the needed skills in accounting graduates (Kavanagh & Drennan, 2008) through the development of a responsive accounting curriculum (Ahmad & Gao, 2004; Ameyaw et al., 2017; De Lange et al., 2006). We replicated part of the study of Awayiga et al., (2010) to examine the professional and technical skills of accounting graduates in relation to the knowledge acquired.

We elicited the views of accounting graduates and supervisors employed in public and private sectors on the professional and technical skills they possessed and believe to be important for a successful career in accounting. The survey results show that communication skills, computer competencies and analytical and critical thinking are the most important professional skills for a successful career in accounting. Other skills considered important were interpersonal, intellectual and management skills were equally considered important as critical success factors. However, professional demeanor and functional skills were rated low among the 14 items.

Technological competence in terms of computer application in accounting has remained a key factor in a successful accounting profession. Our survey results rated spreadsheet, database and presentation packages as very important technical skills required of an accounting graduate. Equally important were web-based applications, word processing and communication software to the accounting profession.

However, window application was rated low followed by e-commerce. Our findings also pointed that public sector accounting, cost and financial accounting and computer application in accounting were among the areas that the graduate has acquired substantial knowledge and was considered relevant for the task given to them. Despite this, the level of coverage of certain areas has remained a challenge.

The findings of this study have empirically indicated that generic or professional skills are equally important as functional skills suggesting that there is a dire need to put more emphasis on soft skills for a successful career in accounting. This is achievable through the design of a responsive accounting degree curriculum to meet the global needs of the ever-changing business environment. Furthermore, this study suggests that the existing accounting curriculum does not provide accounting graduates with the needed general knowledge alongside the professional skills for a successful career as indicated in the course coverage. Hence, the call for a review of the degree program to include these important skills in developing professional accountants in Nigeria.

This study has empirically contributed to the existing literature on accounting education by assessing the important skills of accounting graduates in Nigeria for possible redesigning of the accounting curriculum to respond to changing business environment. In so doing, it provided evidence on accounting education in Nigeria and further revealed that there is no significant difference in skills required of Nigerian accounting graduates and other advanced countries. However, there is an observed delay in changing the content of the accounting curriculum in Nigeria. The existing curriculum has outlived its relevance because it was developed and approved in 2007 fourteen years ago.

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