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HARD SKILLS INITIATIVES AND ESSENTIAL FOR REDUCING THE ADVERSE EFFECTS OF ECONOMIC TURBULENCE AMONG LECTURERS IN UNIVERSITIES IN EBONYI STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study examined hard skills initiatives essential for reducing the adverse effects of economic turbulence among business education lecturers in universities in Ebony State, Nigeria. To achieve the study objectives, two research questions were raised, and the corresponding hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. A descriptive survey design was adopted. The population for the study was 18, consisting of university lecturers. There was no sampling technique since the population is not too large. Data were collected through a validated questionnaire titled Hard Skills Initiatives and Essentials for Reducing the Adverse Effects of Economic Turbulence (HSIERAEET). Cronbach's alpha method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument, with a reliability coefficient of 0.87. The mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while t-test statistics were used to analyze the hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that hard skills are essential for reducing the adverse effects of economic turbulence among university lecturers in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Based on the findings, it was concluded that to mitigate these adverse effects, it is essential for lecturers in Ebonyi State, Nigeria, to invest in hard skills initiatives to navigate the challenges posed by economic turbulence. By enhancing technical proficiency, research capabilities, technological skills, and entrepreneurial acumen, lecturers can contribute to the overall strength and stability of university lecturers' financial strength to curtail economic uncertainties. It was recommended, among other things, that prioritizing the development of hard skills will ensure that lecturers remain competitive, innovative, and capable of contributing significantly to their fields and communities during times of economic uncertainty.

Keywords: *Hard skills, Initiatives, economic turbulence, business education lecturers*

Introduction

Over the past decade, Nigeria's economy has faced recurrent turbulence, characterized by rising inflation, persistent naira depreciation, declining crude oil revenues, and an escalating cost of living (Adeniran & Umeh, 2021). These economic instabilities have triggered ripple effects across all sectors, particularly the education sector. University lecturers, especially those in Ebonyi State, have had to contend with worsening working conditions, poor remuneration, delayed or irregular salary payments, and limited access to research and development opportunities (Okoli & Nwachukwu, 2020). These conditions have adversely impacted not only their personal welfare but also their professional efficiency and the overall effectiveness of the institutions in which they work. In the face of such challenges, the need for adaptability and economic resilience among academic staff has never been greater. One of the most viable strategies for navigating this uncertain environment is the acquisition and application of hard skills—specific, teachable, and measurable abilities such as information and communication technology (ICT) proficiency, data analysis, financial literacy, proposal writing, budgeting, and entrepreneurial competence (Ogundele, 2022). These skills are essential for functioning effectively in today's knowledge-driven economy. For university lecturers, hard skills can open up alternative income streams through research grants, online teaching, consultancies, and digital innovation, while also improving administrative and teaching effectiveness (Emenike & Adebayo, 2021).

However, despite the growing importance of these skills, many lecturers in Nigerian public universities are yet to receive adequate training or institutional support to develop them. The problem is compounded by weak policy frameworks and poorly implemented professional development programs (Nwankwo & Chukwu, 2019). In states like Ebonyi, where universities struggle with infrastructural deficits and limited internally generated revenue, the development of hard skills becomes even more critical, yet increasingly difficult to attain. This gap highlights a growing concern about how prepared lecturers are to withstand economic shocks and maintain relevance in an evolving academic and economic landscape. To further underscore this issue, several recent empirical studies have drawn attention to the positive impact of hard skills on economic resilience among academic staff. For instance, Okafor and Nwankwo (2023) found that lecturers trained in ICT, financial literacy, proposal writing, and data analysis were significantly more capable of securing grants, engaging in consultancies, and adapting to online teaching. Similarly, Adebayo and Yusuf (2022) discovered that professional skills such as digital competence and project management were strong predictors of lecturers' ability to diversify income and remain productive during economic downturns. Chukwu and Edeh (2021) also identified a glaring gap between the need for hard skills and the institutional support available, particularly in Ebonyi and Enugu States, where infrastructural and financial challenges limit access to relevant training.

Against this backdrop, this study seeks to investigate the role of hard skills initiatives in reducing the adverse effects of economic turbulence on university lecturers in Ebonyi State. It aims to explore how the possession, utilization, and institutional support for hard skills contribute to lecturers' personal and institutional resilience, and to recommend actionable strategies for enhancing their access to and engagement with these critical competencies.

Problem of the Study

The Nigerian economy has continued to experience persistent and deepening economic turbulence characterized by inflation, currency devaluation, unstable fiscal policies, and declining public investment in education. These conditions have disproportionately impacted university lecturers who rely heavily on fixed incomes and limited professional development support from their institutions. In Ebonyi State, where universities already grapple with underfunding, infrastructural decay, and limited economic opportunities, lecturers are increasingly vulnerable to the adverse effects of the economic downturn. Despite the potential of hard skills—such as data analysis, ICT proficiency, financial literacy, proposal writing, and entrepreneurial abilities—to equip lecturers with the tools to adapt and thrive in uncertain economic times, there appears to be a limited implementation and integration of these initiatives within the university system in Ebonyi State. Most lecturers continue to depend solely on their salaries, with minimal access to alternative income-generating avenues or skill-based career diversification. This lack of exposure and access to hard skills training further exacerbates their economic vulnerability and reduces their capacity for innovation and resilience in their professional roles. Moreover, while national and international literature increasingly emphasizes the importance of hard skills in career resilience and economic adaptability, there is a dearth of empirical studies focusing on how such initiatives have impacted lecturers within the specific context of Ebonyi State. The absence of contextualized data on the role of hard skills in mitigating the negative effects of economic instability creates a gap in both policy and practice. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the extent to which hard skills initiatives are adopted by university lecturers in Ebonyi State and how effective they are in

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reducing the adverse effects of economic turbulence on their professional and economic well-being.

Research Objectives

The study examined the hard skills initiatives and their essentials for reducing the adverse effects of economic turbulence among lecturers in universities in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study examined the:

1. Extent to which university lecturers in Ebonyi State possess and utilize hard skills in response to economic turbulence.
2. Effectiveness of institutional hard skills initiatives in reducing the adverse effects of economic hardship among lecturers in universities in Ebonyi State.

Research Questions

Two research questions was used in the study

1. To what extent do university lecturers in Ebonyi State possess and utilize hard skills to mitigate the effects of economic turbulence?
2. How effective are institutional hard skills initiatives in addressing the economic challenges faced by university lecturers in Ebonyi State?

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design, which is particularly appropriate for research in education and the social sciences, where the goal is to gather and interpret opinions, perceptions, and experiences of a clearly defined population. The descriptive approach enabled the researcher to systematically collect, analyze, and interpret data related to hard skills initiatives without manipulating any variables. It also facilitated the examination of trends, patterns, and relationships among key variables in a natural, real-world setting. The population for this study comprised all 18 Business Education lecturers from universities in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. These lecturers were considered suitable for the study due to their active engagement in academic responsibilities and their direct exposure to economic realities within the Nigerian university system. Given the relatively small population size, the researcher adopted a census approach, thereby including all members of the population in the study without applying any sampling techniques.

The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled Hard Skills Initiatives and Essentials for Reducing the Adverse Effects of Economic Turbulence (HSIERAEET). The questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on a comprehensive review of relevant literature and theoretical frameworks relating to hard skills and economic resilience. It was designed to measure two major variables: (1) Hard Skills Possession and Utilization, and (2) Effectiveness of Hard Skills Initiatives in Reducing Economic Turbulence. Each of these variables was assessed using six items, structured on a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1). To establish content and face validity, the instrument was reviewed by two experts in Business Education and one expert in Measurement and Evaluation. Their feedback was incorporated to improve the clarity and relevance of the items, as well as to ensure alignment with the research objectives. For reliability testing, the questionnaire was pilot-tested on a group of 10 Business Education lecturers from the University of Calabar, who were not part of the main study. The responses from the pilot study were analyzed using the Cronbach’s Alpha method, yielding a reliability coefficient of 0.87. This result indicated a high level of internal consistency, thereby confirming that the instrument was reliable for use in the main study.

The researchers administered the questionnaire to all participants in the target universities. This direct approach enhanced the response rate and allowed for on-the-spot clarification of any ambiguities in the questionnaire items. Adequate time was given to respondents to complete the instrument, and all ethical principles—including voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality—were strictly observed throughout the data collection process. Data collected from the study were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, as they helped in determining the general trends in the respondents' opinions on each item. To test the null hypotheses, the independent sample t-test was employed at a 0.05 level of significance. This helped determine whether there were statistically significant differences in the responses of lecturers based on selected demographic characteristics.

Findings of the Study

Research question 1

To what extent do university lecturers in Ebonyi State possess and utilize hard skills to mitigate the effects of economic turbulence?

Table 1: Mean rating of Respondents Responses on the extent do university lecturers in Ebonyi State possess and utilize hard skills to mitigate the effects of economic turbulence

S/No	Items on Hard Skills Possession and Utilization	Mean	SD	Decision
1	I possess computer and ICT skills that help me manage academic and non-academic tasks efficiently.	3.30	0.62	Agree
2	I can design and teach online courses using digital platforms.	3.18	0.66	Agree
3	I utilize data analysis tools in carrying out research and consultancy work.	3.25	0.59	Agree
4	I have financial literacy skills that help me manage personal finances better during economic hardship.	3.15	0.71	Agree
5	I have applied for grants or funding using my proposal writing skills.	3.10	0.68	Agree
6	I actively use entrepreneurial skills to generate additional income aside from my salary.	3.22	0.65	Agree
	Grand Mean	**3.20**	**0.65**	**Agree**

The data in Table 1 reveal that university lecturers in Ebonyi State possess and actively utilize various hard skills to cope with economic challenges. All six items scored above 3.00 on a 4-point Likert scale, indicating strong agreement among respondents. Specifically, lecturers demonstrated proficiency in computer and ICT skills (Mean = 3.30), online course design and teaching (Mean = 3.18), and data analysis tools for research and consultancy (Mean = 3.25). They also exhibited financial literacy (Mean = 3.15), proposal writing skills for grants (Mean = 3.10), and entrepreneurial skills for income generation (Mean = 3.22). The overall grand mean score of 3.20 confirms that lecturers effectively utilize these skills to mitigate economic hardship, with a low standard deviation indicating consistent perceptions across respondents.

Research question 2

How effective are institutional hard skills initiatives in addressing the economic challenges faced by university lecturers in Ebonyi State?

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Table 2: Mean rating of Respondents Responses on the ffective are institutional hard skills initiatives in addressing the economic challenges faced by university lecturers in Ebonyi State

S/No	Items on Effectiveness of Hard Skills Initiatives in Reducing Economic Turbulence	Mean	SD	Decision
1	My university provides regular training programs focused on hard skills development.	3.28	0.58	Agree
2	The hard skills training I received has improved my ability to cope with economic challenges.	3.35	0.6	Agree
3	University-sponsored workshops or seminars have exposed me to alternative income-generating opportunities.	3.18	0.63	Agree
4	Institutional support for hard skill acquisition has increased my productivity and job satisfaction.	3.22	0.61	Agree
5	Hard skill development initiatives are adequately funded and implemented in my university.	3.16	0.67	Agree
6	Access to hard skills training has made me more resilient to economic instability.	3.30	0.59	Agree
	Grand Mean	**3.25**	**0.61**	**Agree**

The findings in Table 2 show that institutional hard skills initiatives are effective in supporting university lecturers during economic instability. Respondents generally have a positive perception, with all items scoring above the benchmark of 3.00 on a 4-point Likert scale. Key points include the recognition that universities provide regular training programs focused on hard skills development (Mean = 3.28), which help lecturers cope with economic challenges (Mean = 3.35). Additionally, workshops and seminars expose lecturers to income-generating opportunities (Mean = 3.18), while skill acquisition increases productivity and job satisfaction (Mean = 3.22). Respondents also agree that these initiatives are well-funded and have improved resilience to economic instability (Mean = 3.30). The overall grand mean of 3.25 confirms that lecturers view these initiatives as effective in enhancing their adaptability, productivity, and financial stability.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study, which reveal that university lecturers in Ebonyi State possess and utilize hard skills to mitigate economic challenges, align with several empirical studies in the existing body of literature. For instance, Okoro and Jimoh (2021) investigated the role of digital and entrepreneurial skills among academic staff in Nigerian universities and found that lecturers who possessed ICT competencies and entrepreneurial capabilities were better able to manage the financial pressures associated with fluctuating economic conditions. Their study emphasized that ICT skills, such as online course design and virtual teaching, have become critical for sustaining income through remote engagements and academic consulting—consistent with the present study's findings. Similarly, Adebayo and Aluko (2020) observed that financial literacy and grant-writing proficiency were strong predictors of economic resilience among lecturers in Southwest Nigeria. Their results suggested that lecturers with the capacity to manage personal finances and secure external funding were more likely to withstand economic instability, a point also confirmed by the current research where financial literacy and proposal writing were rated highly. In agreement, Eze and Chukwuma (2019) found that the application of data analysis tools and entrepreneurial ventures significantly contributed to lecturers' ability to generate supplementary income and remain professionally relevant. Their study revealed that many lecturers used research consultancy and small-scale businesses to buffer against the negative effects of inconsistent salary payments and inflation. Conversely, Ibrahim and Duniya (2018) argued that while hard skills are necessary, the lack of continuous institutional support and updated training programs often limits the effectiveness of these skills in real economic crises. Although this view somewhat contrasts with the positive perspective of the current study, it does not outrightly dispute the presence or utilization of hard skills but rather highlights gaps in their enhancement and application. In conclusion, the findings of the present study are largely supported by empirical evidence, demonstrating that hard skills such as ICT, financial literacy, entrepreneurship, and research-related competencies are essential tools employed by lecturers to cushion the effects of economic turbulence. However, some scholars caution that without consistent institutional backing, the long-term impact of these skills may be diminished.

The findings related to the second research question indicate that institutional hard skills initiatives are perceived as effective in equipping university lecturers in Ebonyi State with the capabilities to cope with economic challenges. This assertion is reinforced by a grand mean score of 3.25, suggesting widespread agreement among lecturers regarding the value and effectiveness of institutional interventions such as training programs, workshops, and seminars aimed at developing hard skills. This result finds strong support Chukwuemeka and Nwachukwu (2020) found that institutions that regularly invest in capacity-building programs for lecturers enhance their staff's resilience to external economic pressures. Their study revealed that hard skills training significantly improved academic staff's competence in seeking alternative income sources, increasing productivity, and enhancing morale, which aligns with the present study's findings. Likewise, Adamu and Hassan (2021) in their research on university professional development initiatives in Northern Nigeria concluded that well-funded and consistent hard skills programs helped lecturers develop income-generating skills such as digital content creation, grant writing, and online course delivery. These institutional efforts translated into improved job satisfaction and economic adaptability among academic staff. Furthermore, Ekanem (2019) reported that lecturers exposed to university-sponsored seminars and skills development workshops were more likely to venture into consultancy, entrepreneurial services, and online education—avenues that reduced their dependence on unstable salary incomes. This supports the view that institutional initiatives play a crucial role in mitigating economic instability. However, a differing view is presented by Uzor and Maduka (2018), who argue that although such initiatives exist in some universities, they are often poorly funded, inconsistently implemented, and not tailored to the real needs of lecturers. They contended that the absence of follow-up support and practical application reduces the overall effectiveness of such programs. While this position offers a critical perspective, it doesn't completely negate the positive perceptions reported in the current study—it rather suggests the need for sustained and improved implementation.

Conclusion

This study has examined the extent to which university lecturers in Ebonyi State possess and utilize hard skills to navigate the economic challenges they face. The findings indicate that lecturers have a strong command of various hard skills, including computer and ICT skills, online course design, data analysis tools, financial literacy, proposal writing for grants, and entrepreneurial skills. The mean scores above 3.00 for all items reflect the respondents' high level of agreement regarding their proficiency in these areas. The data suggest that these hard skills are not only essential for academic productivity, such as teaching online courses and conducting research, but also play a crucial role in mitigating financial difficulties. Lecturers actively use these skills to diversify their income sources, improve their financial resilience, and enhance their professional development. The positive perceptions across all respondents further emphasize the effectiveness of hard skills in addressing the economic instability affecting the higher education sector. In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of continuous investment in hard skills development for university lecturers, as these competencies significantly contribute to their adaptability, productivity, and financial stability during times of economic turbulence. The findings suggest that institutional support for further skill acquisition can further enhance lecturers' ability to cope with such challenges, ensuring their long-term career success and overall well-being.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Universities in Ebonyi State should expand and improve training programs focused on developing key hard skills, particularly in digital literacy, financial management, and entrepreneurship. This will help lecturers better navigate economic challenges and boost their financial resilience.
2. Universities should provide greater support for lecturers to apply their hard skills in generating additional income. This can include workshops on grant writing, facilitating consultancy opportunities, and creating platforms for entrepreneurial initiatives, fostering both financial stability and professional growth.

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