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STRATEGIES FOR STRENGTHENING SOFT SKILLS IN TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION PROGRAMMES IN RIVERS STATE: A ROADMAP FOR EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR TECHNICAL EDUCATION GRADUATES

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Abstract
The study sought to investigate strategies for strengthening soft skills in technology education programme in Rivers State: A roadmap for employment opportunities for technical education graduates. Three research questions guided the study. The study adopted survey research design. The population of the study was one hundred and seven (107) technology educators. There was no sampling due to the small size of the population. The instrument used for data collection was a 24-item structured questionnaire which was face and content validated by three experts in the Department of Technology Education, Rivers State University, Port Harcourt. Cronbach Alpha reliability method was employed to determine the internal consistency of the instrument which yielded a coefficient of 0.85. Mean and standard deviation were the statistical tools used to answer the research questions. The result of the study revealed that there are soft skills in technology education programme in Rivers State that are needed to be strengthened as a roadmap for employment opportunities for technical education graduates. It was therefore recommended among others that technology educators whose duty is to train technical education students to acquire soft skills for employment opportunities upon graduation should ensure that these soft skills are properly imparted on the students during the period of their training in the school.

Keywords*: Strengthening, soft skills, roadmap, employment, opportunities.*

Introduction

Technology refers to the application of scientific knowledge, skills and innovations to create products, tools and system that improve human life and solve problems and increase efficiency. According to Okwelle and Owo (2019) technology refers to the information, techniques and tools with which individuals utilize the available resources of their environment to satisfy the needs of mankind. In the same vein, Bread cited in Ugwu and Hassan (2024) defines technology as the result of man's effort to do things more efficiently. It is the systematic application of scientific and technical knowledge and skills to proffer solutions to the numerous different needs of man. The essence of technology therefore is to improve the world in which we live. According to Peters and Zulu (2023) technology connotes the study, mastery and utilization of manufacturing method and industrial arts to bring about socio-economic development in the world. One of the ways of advancing technological innovation is via technology education.

Technology education which comprised both general and specific education element deals with the application of technological skills and expertise in the industry to meet targets (Rooney and Tores, 2024). Similarly, Michael (2025) defined technology education as a body of knowledge separate from but related to the sciences and with specific certificate requirement. Technology education as added in Michael therefore entails a broad spectrum of knowledge and activities which offer opportunities to apply numerous academic concepts via practical mind-on/hand-on applications that give academic concepts global relevance. Technology education as educational programme offered at the tertiary level of education in Nigeria offer courses in broad areas of specialization such as Mechanical

Technology, Building Technology, Automobile Technology, Wood Work Technology, Electrical/Electronic Technology, among others. These courses are designed to promote the inculcation of requisite theoretical knowledge as well as practical skills in the students that will enable them gain employment or become employers of labour upon graduation.

Skill is the ability, proficiently or dexterity to do something well arising from talent, experience, training and or practice. According to Egbo and Bolaji (2022) skill is human capacity to perform any activity with dexterity and competence. Skill can be seen as special abilities in a given occupation acquired through learning and practice (Cooker and James, 2024). In the view of Ikechukwu (2023) skill refers to individual capacity to control element of behaviour, thinking and feeling with specific contexts and within a particular task domain. Skill therefore entails specific abilities gained through committed learning and practice which enable an individual to be proficient in his/her work role in a chosen occupational field. Thus, for technology education students to be proficient in showing skill and competence in doing something better in their chosen field of study, there is need to develop their soft skills effectively.

Scott and Polevoi (2024) posited that soft skills are aspects of skills that technology education students needed to acquire on in order to be proficient in their chosen field of study. Soft skills in the view of Venon and Bush (2022) refers to the non-technical personal attributes, and personality traits that enhance an individual's ability to interact, communicate, and work effectively with others. According to Obodokwe and Amakiri (2023) key aspects of soft skills include; interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, adaptability, time management, and problem-solving. Akineye and Musa (2021) stated that soft skills are very important personal attributes and personality traits that can enhance technology education students' ability to interact and work effectively with others. Other importance of soft skills as added in Akineye and Musa are that soft skills are essential for career growth and achievement, they facilitate effective communication and collaboration, soft skills enable individuals to approach problems, creatively and develop innovative solution, they are critical for leadership roles as they enable individuals to inspire, motivate, and guide others, soft skills contribute to personal growth, self-awareness, and emotional intelligence. Akwoma and Nwankwo (2021) maintained that there are soft skills in technology education programme that are needed to be strengthened which will help as a roadmap for employment opportunity for technology education students upon graduation. In the same vein, Kalu and Ezekwe (2025) opined those soft skills that are needed to be strengthened on students undergoing training in any of the specialized areas of technology education programme for employment opportunity upon graduation include; communication skills, team-work, adaptability skill, leadership skill and management skills. Also, Willson (2021) noted that soft skills that are needed to be strengthened on technical education graduates are; problem-solving skills, emotional intelligence, adaptability and flexibility. Strengthening of the above stated soft skills in technology education programme according to Ohovire and Paul (2022) will successfully assist the students to function efficiently in their work place.

Strengthening refers to the process of making something stronger, more resilient, or more effective. According to Kio and Lenz (2021), strengthening is effort put in place in order to ensure that a programme is more effective as to achieve organizational goals. In general strengthening involves investing efforts, resources or time to improve the quality, capacity, or performance of something. In the context of this study, strengthening is the process put in place in order to make technology education programmes more efficient in terms of investing, resources and time as to improve the quality capacity and performance of students of technology education programme that will assist them to gain employment upon graduation from school. Technology education as a training programme designed to assist individual to acquire knowledge and practical skills that are required for gainful employment needed to be strengthened if the objective of the programme must be achieved. To achieve the objectives of technology education programme Ukaiwe and Ibrahim (2021) stated that stake holders in education, educational policy makers and educator in technology education need to adopt effective strategies that will strengthen technology education programme in Nigeria.

Kalu and Ezekwe (2025), posited that strategies offer a framework within which an organization or individual defines possible means of achieving a goal and objectives (Albert, 2023). Agambi and Lukeman (2024) opined that strategy is all about competitive position about differentiating yourself in the eyes of the students or customers as the case maybe about adding value through a mix of activities different from those used by competitors. Agambi and Lukeman also viewed strategy as a combination of the ends (goals) for which the firm or institution is striving and the policies by which it is seeking to achieve. Strategy can be seen as that step which management, administrators or teachers take that is of great importance to the organization or institution. In line with the above definitions Hoosteria (2022) stated that students boredom diminishes their attention, lower their achievement and interest in running their programme in school and is a likely reason for dropping out of school, therefore, technology educators need to adopt different strategies in other to improve the quality of training that are to be given to the students during their training period in the school;

Technology educators are professionals responsible for teaching and instructing students about technology, its applications and its implications. According to Nwokolo and Chikwe (2021) technology educators are trained individual that are qualified to train students who are undergoing training in institutions of higher learning. In the view of Akazua and Odo (2023) technology educators are individual who have acquired pedagogical knowledge and skill from recognized institution of learning that will be charged with the responsibility of teaching and training students about and how technology can be applied. According to Fayol (2025) skills and qualities required of a technology educator that will enable him/her teach and instruct students effectively are; technical expertise, pedagogical knowledge, communication skills and flexibility and adaptability. Technology educators according to Dibia and Umukoro (2021) have major roles to play in strengthening soft skill in technology education. Technology educators, Dibia and Umukoro added are the pivot nucleus around which other variables of technology education instruction revolve. Bello and Idris (2024) stated that the key roles and responsibility of technology educators in strengthening soft skills in technology education include; curriculum development, instruction and training, hands on training assessment and evaluation. In the view of Basil and Taylor (2021) the role of technology educators in strengthening soft skills in technology education include; designing and developing curriculum content, teach students about various technological concepts, tools and systems, provide guidance to standard and assess learning outcomes.

Past research work such as (Ekewuba, 2021; Hugh, 2020; Havey, 2024) revealed that there are strategies that must be adopted in technology education programme in order to effectively strengthen soft skills development that can aid as a roadmap for employment opportunity for technology education graduates upon graduation. According to Izendu and Kamalu (2022) strategies that must be adopted for strengthening of technology education programme in terms of soft skills development include; regular training and re-training of technology education educators; adequate funding of technology education programme, adequate provision of instructional materials. Rotus and Jerad (2023) outlined the following strategies as adequate strategies that must be adopted to achieve the goal of strengthening technology education programme in Nigeria tertiary institutions; regular payment of technology educators allowance, rewarding quality research work carried out by technology educators, giving approval for further study, organizing regular workshop/seminars for technology educators and provision of computers and internet service in all the training institutions in Nigeria . These strategies Rofus and Jerad added if properly adopted will assist in strengthening soft skills in technology education programme that will help the graduates of technology education for gainful employment opportunities upon graduation from school.

Statement of the Problem

Technology education has one of its major goals, the inculcation of relevant skills in the students for employment opportunities. It was seen that graduates of technology education in Nigeria are found to be lacking in the area of skills acquisition which makes it almost impossible for them to secure paid job in the industries or become self-reliant leading to increase poverty and criminality in the society as witnessed in the country today (Okwelle and Owo, 2019). According to Michael (2025), the Nigerian labour market reports that Nigerian graduates do not possess the requisite employable skills due to poor implementation of educational curriculum. In the same vein, Nwadibeyi and Nwadi (2020) stipulate that most technology educators in Nigeria institutions do not play their instructional role in developing students in relevant skills that they needed to function in the industry upon graduation. The study therefore, seeks to find out strategies for strengthening soft skills in technology education as a tool to address the menace of students' inadequate soft skills acquisition in Nigerian technology education programme.

Research Questions

The following three research questions were posed by the researchers to guide the study:

1. What are the soft skills in technology education programme that are needed to be strengthened as a roadmap for employment opportunity for technical education graduates in Rivers State?
2. What are the roles of technology educators in strengthening soft skills in technology education programme in Rivers State as a roadmap for employment opportunities for technical education graduates?
3. What are the strategies that are required to be adopted for strengthening of soft skills in technology education programme in Rivers State as a roadmap for employment opportunity for technical education graduates?

Methods

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study consists of 107 technology educators from three tertiary institutions in Rivers State that offered programme in technology education (Rivers State University, Port Harcourt, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt and Federal College of Education Technical, Omoku). No sampling was taken considering the small and manageable size of the population. A self-structured 28-item questionnaire designed by the researcher and titled "Strategies for Strengthening Soft Skills in Technology Education Programme for Employment Opportunity Questionnaire (SSSTEPEP)" was the instrument used for data collection from the respondents. The instrument was constructed on a - 4-point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD) with corresponding values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instrument was face and content validated by three experts in Technology Education from Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike, Abia State. The instrument's reliability was ascertained with the use of Cronbach's alpha correlation method in which a reliability coefficient of 0.85 was obtained. 107 copies of the instrument were administered to the respondents directly by the researchers with the help of five research assistants. The total number of copies retrieved after two weeks was 100 copies and were used for data analysis. Mean and standard deviation are the statistical tools used to answer the research questions. Standard deviation was used to show homogeneity in the responses of the respondents. Thus, it was decided that an item with a calculated mean value equal or greater than 2.50 (2.50 – 4.00) is accepted while an item is rejected if the mean value falls below the criterion mean of 2.50. The computation of mean and standard deviation was carried out with Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

Results

The results of the study are presented in Tables 1-3 in line with the research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the soft skills in technology education programme that are needed to be strengthened as a roadmap for employment opportunity for technical education graduates in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on Soft Skills in Technology Education Programme that are needed to be Strengthened ***N = 100***

S/N	Soft Sills Needed	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
1.	Ability to communicate	2.61	0.73	Agree
2.	Ability to collaborate			Agree
3.	Ability to build relationship with other.	2.79	0.78	Agree
4.	Self-awareness skills	2.83	0.79	Agree
5.	Empathy and social skills to manage one's emotions and those of others.	2.91	0.83	Agree
6.	Ability to adjust to new situations challenges and technologies.	2.75	0.74	Agree
7.	Ability to prioritize tasks.	2.88	0.80	Agree
8.	Ability to manage time and meet deadlines.	3.00	0.85	Agree
9.	Ability to analyze problems	3.15	0.87	Agree
10.	Ability to think critically and develop creative solutions.	2.98	0.84	Agree
	Average Mean/SD	**2.59**	**0.73**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The results in Table 1 indicated that all the 10 items are soft skills in technology education programme that are needed to be strengthened as a roadmap for employment opportunity for technical education graduates in Rivers State. This is indicted by the mean values of all the items which are above the criterion mean of 2.50. The standard deviation values obtained for these items revealed homogeneity in the responses of the respondents.

Research Question 2: What are the roles of technology educators in strengthening soft skills in technology education programmes in Rivers State as a roadmap for employment opportunities for technical education graduates?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation on the roles of Technology Educators in Strengthening Soft Skills in Technology Education *N = 100*

S/N	Roles of Technology Educators	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
11.	Design and develop curriculum that align with educational standard and goals.	0.03	0.85	Agree
12.	Deliver instruction and teach students.	2.94	0.82	Agree
13.	Assess students academic work.	2.68	0.79	Agree
14.	Evaluate teaching and learning outcome.	2.68	0.74	Agree
15.	Providing feedback to improve understanding.	2.75	0.75	Agree
16.	Providing feedback to improve students skills.	2.81	0.76	Agree
17.	Make recommendation for award of students certificate.	2.92	0.80	Agree

18.	Influence learners in every direction during instruction.	2.84	0.77	Agree
	Average Mean/SD	**2.83**	**0.76**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The results in Table 2 indicted that all the 8 items are roles expected of technology educators to play in strengthening soft skills in technology education programme in Rivers State as a roadmap for employment opportunities for technical education graduates. This is indicated by the mean values of all the items which are above the criterion mean of 2.50. The standard deviation values obtained for these items revealed homogeneity in the responses of the respondents.

Research Question 3: What are the strategies that are required to be adopted for strengthening of soft skills in technology education programme in Rivers State as a roadmap for employment opportunity for technical education graduates?

Table 3: Means and Standard Deviation on Strategies Required to be adopted for Strengthening of Soft Skills in Technology Education *N = 100*

S/N	Strategies Required	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remark
19.	Regular training and re-training of technology educators.	2.85	0.82	Agree
20.	Adequate funding of technology education programme.	2.61	0.80	Agree
21.	Regular review of technology education programme.	2.73	0.83	Agree
22.	Adequate provision of instructional materials.	3.00	0.87	Agree
23.	Conducive teaching and learning environment.	2.72	0.81	Agree
24.	Regular payment of technology educators allowance.	2.81	0.84	Agree
25.	Rewarding of quality research work conducted by technology educators.	2.69	0.79	Agree
26.	Approving loan for further academic pursuit of technology educators.	2.94	0.84	Agree
27.	Organizing regular workshop/seminar for technology educators.	2.87	0.83	Agree
28.	Provision of computers and internet service.	2.80	0.81	Agree
	Average Mean/SD	**2.80**	**0.82**	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The results in Table 3 indicated that all the 10 items are strategies required to be adopted by government and school authority for strengthening of soft skills in technology education programme in Rivers State as a roadmap for employment opportunity for technical education graduates. This is indicated by the mean values of all the items which are above the criterion mean of 2.50. The standard deviation values obtained for these items revealed homogeneity in the responses of the respondents.

Discussion

The discussion of findings of the study were made according to the research questions.

Soft Skills in Technology Education Programmes that are needed to be Strengthened as a Roadmap for Employment Opportunity for Technology Education Graduates

Data presented in Table 1 indicated that ability to communicate, ability to collaborate, self-awareness skills, empathy and social skills to manage one's emotions and those of others, ability to adjust to new situations challenges and technologies, ability to prioritize tasks, ability to manage time and meet deadlines, ability to analyze problems, and ability to think critically and develop creative solutions are soft skills in technology education programme that are required to be strengthened as a roadmap for employment opportunity for technical education graduates in Rivers State. These findings are consistent with Akwomma and Nwankwo (2021) who stated that ability to collaborate, ability to communicate among others are soft skills in technology education programme that are needed to be strengthened which will serve as a roadmap for employment opportunity for students upon their graduation from school. Similarly, Kalu and Ezekwe (2025) equally stated that soft skills that are needed to be strengthened on students undergoing training in any of the specialized area of technology upon their graduation include; communication skills, teamwork, adaptability skills, problem solving skills, interpersonal skills and intelligence skills.

Role of Technology Educators in Strengthening Soft Skills in Technology Education Programme

Data presented in Table 2 indicated that to achieve the goal of strengthening soft skills in technology education programme that technology educators have some major roles to play in technology education programme in Rivers State as roadmap for employment opportunity for technical education graduates. The findings are in line with Bello and Idris (2024) who stated that the key roles and responsibility of technology educators in strengthening soft skills in technology education include, curriculum development, instruction and training, hands on training, assessment and evaluation. Similarly, Basil and Taylor (2021) outlined the roles of technology educators in strengthening soft skills in technology education as; designing and developing curriculum content, teach students about various technological concepts, tools and system, provide guidance to standard and assess learning outcomes.

Strategies that are required to be Adopted or Strengthening of Soft Skills in Technology Education Programmes

The results of the study shown in Table 3 revealed that regular training and re-training of staff, adequate funding, regular review of technology education programmes curriculum among others are some of the strategies that must be adopted for strengthening soft skills in technology education programmes in Rivers State. The finding of this study is in line with Izendu and Kamalu (2020) who highlighted strategies that must be adopted by government and authorities of tertiary institution for strengthening technology education programme in terms of soft skill development to include; regular training and re-training of technology educators, adequate funding of technology education programme, regular review of technology education programme, adequate provision of instructional material. Similarly, Rotus and Jerad (2023) outlined the following strategies as adequate strategies that must be adopted to achieve the goal of strengthening technology education programme, conducive learning environment, regular payment of lecturers' allowance, provision of laptops and internet service, organizing regular workshops and seminars.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was deduced that ability to communicate, ability to collaborate, ability to build relationship with others, self-awareness, ability to adjust to new situations challenges and technologies and ability to prioritize tasks are soft skills that are needed to be strengthened as a roadmap for employment opportunity for students in Rivers State. Also, taken part in designing and developing curriculum, delivering instruction, teach students, assessing students' academic work, evaluating teaching and learning and providing feedback to improve students' skills are technology

educators role for strengthening soft skills in technology education programme in Rivers State. Finally, regular review of technology education programme, adequate provision of fund, regular training and re-training programme for technology education lecturers and adequate provision of instructional material are effective strategies that must be adopted by government and authorities of higher institutions of learning in order to achieve the goal of strengthening soft skills in technology education in Rivers State as a roadmap for employment opportunity for technical education graduates.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

1. Technology educators should ensure that technology education students undergoing training in technology related areas are properly trained to improve on their skills for employment opportunity.
2. Government at all levels in Nigeria should ensure that training and re-training of teachers of technology should be regularly organized.

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