



## ASSESSMENT OF SOCIAL SKILLS AMONG IMMIGRATION OFFICERS IN RIVERS STATE COMMAND

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigated on the assessment of social skills among immigration officers in Rivers State Command. The study was guide by three research question. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design a sample of 115 immigration officers drawn using convenience sampling technique. A researcher development instrument was used for data collection. The validity and reliability of the instrument was well-established. Data analysis was done using frequency count, mean, standard deviation and result was illustrated using bar chart. The result showed that males displayed a higher prevalence of social skills in team work, integrity, time management, conflict management, and anger management, while female officers reported a higher prevalence of the social skills of flexibility and active communication. The result further showed that senior staff displayed a higher mean value than junior staff, with the exception of time management and active communication. Generally, the result showed that there is a high prevalence of social skills among immigration officers in Rivers State command. Based on the results, it was recommended that specialized training and course should be integrated into the orientation programme provided for new recruits into the immigration service.*

### INTRODUCTION

As the wind of globalization continues to blow at an alarming rate and speed, the increasing flow of people goods and services between and within regional and continental border is certain to continue. This has resulted in countries at the national, regional and continental level, to establish policies and programmes that would facilitate effective management of borders. In most countries of the world, this responsibility is carried out jointly by security forces, but majorly the process of regulating the influx of persons, goods and services rests on the shoulder of a specific agency, in the case of Nigeria, the Nigerian Immigration Service.

The basic function of the Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS) is in the opinion of most individuals is the issuance of visas and resident permit, but the function of the NIS involves more than that as captured by the Immigration Act (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2015) which includes the control of persons entering or leaving Nigeria, boarder surveillance and patrol, and performance of para-military duties within and outside Nigeria as may be required of officers under the authority of the act. The porosity of Nigerian boarders coupled with manpower deficiency that can appropriately address the effective control of people at the border, has proved exigent for officers. Also the unabated entry of illegal immigrants with proliferation light weapons and influx of contraband goods through criminal activities has greatly put pressure in assessing the skills of immigration of officers in combating this challenges (Musali, Harun & Zainnudin, 2015).

An intent observation of the responsibilities of officers and men of the NIS, and the challenges they face in their day-to-day indicates that it involves interaction with other individuals. However, this researcher has observed that the competency of officers in discharging their duties is often addressed from the cognitive and intellectual perspective to the neglect of social skills. It is for the purpose that the present work is centered on investigating the prevalence of social skills among immigration officers in Rivers State Command

### CONCEPT OF SOCIAL SKILLS

The concept of social skill is not new to the scientific community, especially those in education, psychology, communication and leadership, the current trend of globalization with its emphasis in international relations and networking. Furthermore the benefits of socials skills to the individual and the organization in which they work have been well documented in the literature. According to Ferris, Perrewe and Douglas (2002), social skills facilitate positive social interactions and results in higher performance ratings, increased number of promotions and salary increase. In addition when compared with other long-researched predictors such as general mental ability and conscientiousness, social skills is unique due to its malleability (Sergin & Givertz, 2003). Therefore when properly identified, promoted and enhanced, social skills can contribute to employees success and organizational growth. Despite these



seemingly obvious benefits of social skills to career and organization growth, how social skills is conceptualized and measured is inconsistent.

The discrepancy in the definition of social skills comes as a little surprising when one considers the myriads of terms that have been used as synonyms to it. To some scholars, social skills is also called soft skills (Cortez, 2014) or social competence (Ferris, Hochwarter, Douglas, Blass, & Kolodinsky, 2002) and interpersonal skills (Genc, 2016). However the interchangeability of these terms will be maintained, because differences between them is threadbare and purely theoretical.

In defining social skills, Wu (2008) sees it as comprising of three distinct skills which are social presentation (the skill that individuals use to present themselves in socially appropriate behavior), social scanning (the skills to detect and identify changing social environment) and social flexibility (the skill to adjust social presentation based on the changes observed from scanning the social environment). Schneider (1992) using the term social competence defined it as an individual difference ability in socially effective behavior that is helpful in achieving social goals. In the opinion of Rubin and Martin (1994) social skill was used synonymously with interpersonal competence and was defined as an impression or judgment formed about a person's ability to manage interpersonal relationships in communication settings. For Ferris, Davidson and Perrew, (2005:7) social skill was conceptualized from the political skill which they defined as a multidimensional construct that refers to the "ability to understand others at work and to use that knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal or organizational objectives". In the opinion of Azim, Gale, Wright, Kirkham, Khan and Alam (2010), unlike technical skills, which are about a person's skill set and ability to perform a certain type of task or activity, soft skills relate to a person's ability to interact effectively with coworkers and customers.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Providing a chronological analysis of social skill models or framework, Wu (2008) stated the earliest known conceptualization of social skills was that done by Argyle and Kendon (1967) specifically for mentally impaired individuals. To them, social skill is a goal-oriented process which starts with accurate perception of social situation, then the skill to behave according to social situation and finally the skill to adjust one's own behavior according to the changing situation. Thereafter, Riggio (1986) who synthesized the social skill training and communication literatures developed a social skill framework for use in non-clinical setting unlike Argyle and Kendon (1967). According to the author, social skills involves six learned sub-skills which allow individuals to express themselves socially, understand environmental stimuli, and fit in with the social environment. Specifically, social expressivity and emotional expressivity helps an individual to convey both verbal and non-verbal messages to communicate with others. Social sensitivity and emotional sensitivity allow individuals to understand both verbal and non-verbal messages. Finally, social control and emotional control allow individuals to manage their emotional and verbal communication to fit in with the social environment. On the basis of this framework, Riggio cited in Wu (2008) defines social skills as an individual difference in communication patterns, which allow individuals to manage their emotion and adapt their behaviors according to the social environment.

The framework developed by Ferris et al (2005) for social skills which they operationalized as political skills was made up of four sub-skills which are social astuteness (ability to sense others' emotion and hidden agenda), interpersonal influence (the ability to be flexible in order to elicit a particular response from others), networking ability (the ability to develop and use the networks created to achieve a certain goal) and apparent sincerity (the ability to demonstrate honesty and authenticity). However researchers such as Morgeson, Reider and Campion (2005:21) have highlighted the difference between political and social skills as they stated that even though social skill and political skill appear to be similar constructs, political skill is a narrower construct than social skill in that it focuses more on specific techniques to help individuals get ahead in a political or corporate arena.

A relatively recent conceptualization of social skill sees it as an individual difference in the following skills: active listening skill, speaking skill, social perceptiveness (the ability to sense other people's reaction and understand such reaction), coordination (adjusting own behavior according to other's behavior), service orientation (actively searching for ways to help others), cooperation (being pleasant and encouraging others to work together), and stress tolerance (behave in a calm manner during stressful situation and deal with criticisms well) (Morgeson, et al 2005). Although it appears that Morgeson et al.'s (2005) social skill construct is a mixed framework because it includes personality construct that are not related with the core definition of social skill, such as service orientation and stress tolerance, the remaining sub-skills are consistent with the sub-facets proposed by the social skill scholars. For example, active listening and speaking skills are related to adequate social presentation while social perceptiveness is consistent with social sensitivity skill. Finally, coordination is consistent with the skill to be socially flexible.

Generally, as asseverated by Wu (2008) the social skill literature agrees on only one thing: that social skills is a complex construct which involves multiple skills, which is distinct but related to personality variables like conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience, as well as general mental ability. However, the semantic proliferation of models, frameworks and sub-skills have done little to stop the burgeoning interest in the study of this area of organization behavior. In contributing to this field, the present study will slightly deviate from previous ones by investigating the prevalence of specific social skills that are essential for the daily activities of officers in the Nigerian Immigration Service generally and those in Rivers command in more precise manner. These



skills as identified by the Human Resource Soft Skill Framework (Cortez, 2014) included communication, anger management, conflict resolution, time management, flexibility, integrity and team work

**Active Communication:** In today's globalized world the importance of communication cannot be overemphasized (John, 2009). When looked at from the job responsibility of immigration officers which basically involves the control of people, goods and services, through the territorial borders of the country, we cannot fail to appreciate the vital essence that communication holds for effective execution of the job. While communication is generally seen as the process of transferring information/messages from one person to another (Okobia, 2011), the extent to which it is implemented and executed in formal organizations has continued to be a source of concern to organizational scientist. Generally, communication as a social skill has been broadly classified into two which are verbal and non-verbal (Ipaye, 2005), but as opined by Kayton et al (2013), there are over 300 task that are considered as vital workplace behavior when dealing with superior officers, colleagues, client or customers but the most prevalent includes active listening, asking question, discussing, sharing information, suggesting, getting feedback, answering questions and explaining.

**Anger management:** Anger is a universal experience that is common to not only humans but also other animal species such as Dogs, Bees and Cat. According to Cavney (2015), anger has an adaptive purpose which has protected organism all through the process of development and for the purpose of this study, the definition provided by the author will be adopted. According to Cavney, anger is an intense emotion typically experienced in relation to feelings of displeasure or insult to one's self or others, or by the intent to do such injury. From this definition, anger therefore originates from the belief or assumption of physical injury or emotional insult.

As individuals who work for and with people, service officials are most times confronted with individuals who are reluctant to follow directives which may result in anger. Also the possibility that someone may be denied visa often leads to altercations between service personnel or with clients. The possibility of getting angry on the job is an everyday reality for service personnel. As anger is an inevitable aspect of officers' daily responsibility, anger management becomes an imperative for successful performance of duties. Anger management according to Moyo Clinic (2016) defined anger management as the process of learning to antecedents of anger and taking action to calm down and deal with anger in a productive manner to achieve self and organizational goals. According to the Australian Psychological Society (2017) some strategies for effective anger management includes identifying the reason anger, taking a time out from the situation, communicating assertively not aggressively, adjusting expectations about people and life generally, understanding other people's point of view, changing internal dialogue, letting go of resentment.

**Conflict management:** Like anger, the potential for conflict in life is inevitable and endemic to all social life. Because of its ubiquity and pervasive nature, the concept of conflict has acquired a multitude of meanings and connotations. However for the purpose of the present study, conflict can be defined as a situation in which two or more parties have incompatible objectives and in which their perceptions and behavior are commensurate with that incompatibility (Bercovitch, cited in Tafel-Viia & Alas, 2009). From this definition, it can be deduced that even in the absence of violence, destruction, inefficiency and irrationality, it is possible for violence to still exist. Also this definition suggests that conflict is a social phenomenon that is found in personal, group, or organizational interactions. The pervasive nature of conflict, has made conflict management a prerequisite skill for effective functioning of security officers (Rinkoo, Mishra, Rahesuddin, Nabi, Chandra & Chandra (2013), including immigration personnel.

Due to the ubiquity nature of conflict, ways of managing conflict are as varied as its causes, origin and context. However, the purpose of conflict management, whether taken by the parties involved in the conflict or whether involving external parties' intervention is to affect the entire structure of a conflict situation so as to contain the destructive components of the conflict process such as the use of violence, hostility, inefficiency and irrationality. For NIS officials, this skills is vital has often at times, they are confronted with conflict situation that task their coping ability. This could arise from managing crowd at airport during flight delay, controlling smugglers at borders, providing reasons for non-issuance of visa etc.

**Time management:** Like many other jobs, the work of officers of the NIS comes with demanding deadlines and occasionally high stakes. Job roles and specifications are regimented and the ability and competence to display a decisive attitude, an unfaltering ability to think clearly and a capacity to utilize minimum time to get function optimally is prized among officers. This because efficiency demands that officers work under pressure even when they are not inclined to work. As such, time management becomes a prerequisite social skill for getting commitment from people and organizing. According to Ojo and Olaniyan (2008) time management can be defined as the judicious use of a specific time period, either long or short to produce results that are compatible with organizational goals. According to Ezine (2008), time management brings about orderliness among colleagues and enables one to be more productive and fulfilled.

**Flexibility:** The skill set which an individual used in getting a job is not the same that is needed in succeeding in the job (Skorstad & Ramsdal, 2009), therefore it is essential that an individual continues to adjust to the demands of the working environment as needed on the job. Flexibility is an important social skills that aids the acquisition of new technical or hard skills and encourages an open mindedness to new tasks and new challenges. Flexibility enables workers to step outside their official job description and get more accomplished by taking on more different task. The importance of this skills can be readily appreciated when the job responsibility of an NIS officer is considered. For every NIS officer including those in Rivers State, the movement around different job roles, offices and functions is an undisputed reality. According to the NIS (2017), there are six broad departments in the service which are Human



Resource Management, Finance & Accounts, Planning, Research & Statistics, Works & Procurement, Investigation, Inspectorate and Enforcement, and operations and passport. Depending on the need of personnel in any department, transfer can be made and this transfer involves dealing with a new set of clientele, colleagues and superior. Therefore the need for flexibility cannot be over-emphasized.

**Integrity:** According to C.S. Lewis (1996) integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is looking". According to the Merriam-Webster (2014), integrity is defined as a firm adherence to a code of moral or artistic value, and is often used in a more generic term such as conscience or good character. According to Audi and Murphy (2006) integrity was ranked as the most important attribute by supervisors and employers. The question is: how is integrity a social skill and why is it important for NIS officers? Generally in the discharge of everyday duty, an officer is presented with situations that challenges the moral value of the service and the conscience of the individual. This could be in the form of financial inducements from smugglers or the presentation of kickback from travel agencies to issue travel documents to questionable persons or for illegal activities.

**Team work:** Like all human activities, optimal success is achievable through the collaborative impact of more than one individual. Nowhere is the demand for team work more essential than in the execution of duties in paramilitary organizations like the NIS. According to Hackman (2002), a team is a group of individuals who interact interdependently and who are brought together or come together voluntarily to achieve certain outcomes or accomplish particular task. Teams and team work are an essential part of getting work done in every organization. For an efficient running of the service, there is need for partnership of different departments and units. Also one of the basic responsibilities of the service as stated in the Immigration Act (2015) is the participation of the service in activities with other security and non-security agencies. Therefore the core values of the service and the common goals of smaller teams is needed when individuals work in teams.

As important as these social skills to the effective running of private and governmental organizations, there is a dearth of empirical works that have focused on the ascertaining the prevalence of them among employers although a few studies have been conducted investigating them. Anjum (2014) investigated the relationship between social skills of managers and job satisfaction among employees in Iran and found out that there is a positive but weak correlation. Investigating the importance of social skills to employees' success, Beheshtifar and Norozy (2013) found out that it is important for interpersonal interaction and improve job outcome. Dean (2017) conducted an extensive study to investigate the soft skills needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century work force and found effective communication to be the most important. An observation of these studies shows a gap in the literature that no study has been conducted that shows the prevalence of social skills among officers of the Nigerian Immigration Service in Rivers State Command. It is this gap in the literature that is the major motivation behind the present study.

## RESEARCH QUESTION

The present study is guided by one overarching research question:

1. What is the prevalence of social skills among male and female immigration officers in Rivers State Command?
2. What is the prevalence of social skills among junior and senior immigration officers in Rivers State Command?
3. What is the prevalence of social skills among immigration officers in Rivers State Command?

## METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey research design was used for the current study. While a sample of 115 immigration officers from the Rivers State Command was conveniently sampled from the 3 Area offices of the command in the state. To ascertain the prevalence of the social skills in this study a seven-item instrument was used in which respondent were required to indicate the effectiveness with which they exhibit each of the social skills. The instrument was constructed on a 4-point likert scale of Highly Effective – 4 points, Somehow Effective – 3 points, Poorly Effective – 2 points and Not Effective – 1 point. The instruments were administered to the respondents during official hours and retrieved on the spot. The rating provided by respondents were weighted and ranked to identify the prevalence of each skill. For data analysis, frequency count, mean, standard deviation were used, while the results obtained were illustrated using bar chart

## RESULT PRESENTATION

**Research Question One:** What is the prevalence of social skills among female and male immigration officers in Rivers State Command?

Research question one was answered using weighted mean and standard deviation as shown in table 1 below

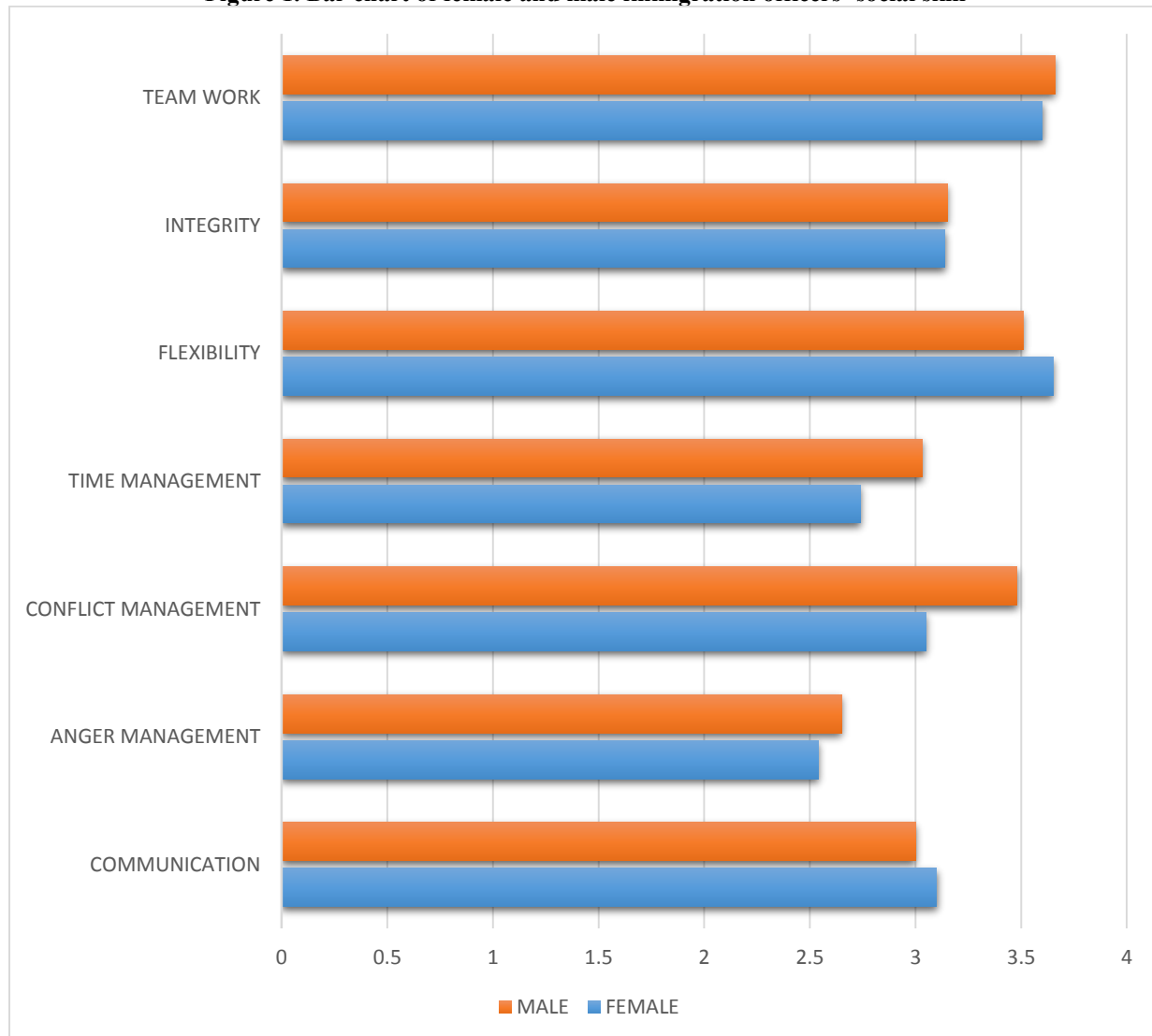
s/n	Item	Female			Male		
		Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank
1	Active Communication	3.10	0.87	4 <sup>th</sup>	3.00	0.82	6 <sup>th</sup>
2	Anger Management	2.54	0.99	7 <sup>th</sup>	2.65	1.03	7 <sup>th</sup>
3	Conflict Management	3.05	0.62	5 <sup>th</sup>	3.48	0.70	3 <sup>rd</sup>



4	Time Management	2.74	1.04	6 <sup>th</sup>	3.03	1.04	5 <sup>th</sup>
5	Flexibility	3.65	0.64	1 <sup>st</sup>	3.51	0.79	2 <sup>nd</sup>
6	Integrity	3.14	0.89	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3.15	0.89	4 <sup>th</sup>
7	Team Work	3.60	0.65	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3.66	0.65	1 <sup>st</sup>
	Grand Mean	3.11	0.81		3.21	0.84	

From the result of the data analysis as presented in table 1, the most prevalent social skill for female immigration officers was flexibility (3.65), followed in order of decreasing prevalence by team work (3.11), integrity (3.14), active communication (3.10), conflict management (3.05), time management (2.74) and lastly anger management. For male officers, the most prevalent social skill was team work (3.66) followed by flexibility (3.51), conflict management (3.48), integrity (3.15), time management (3.08), active communication (3.00) and lastly anger management. From the grand mean value reported, it can be seen that females had a total mean value of 3.11 (SD = 0.81), while males had a total mean value of 3.21 (SD = 0.84), indicating that males had a higher prevalence of social skills than females. A pictorial representation of the result is displayed in figure 1 below

**Figure 1. Bar chart of female and male immigration officers' social skill**



The result further shown in the bar graph above revealed that males displayed a higher prevalence of social skills in team work, integrity, time management, conflict management, and anger management, while female officers reported a higher prevalence of the social skills of flexibility and active communication.

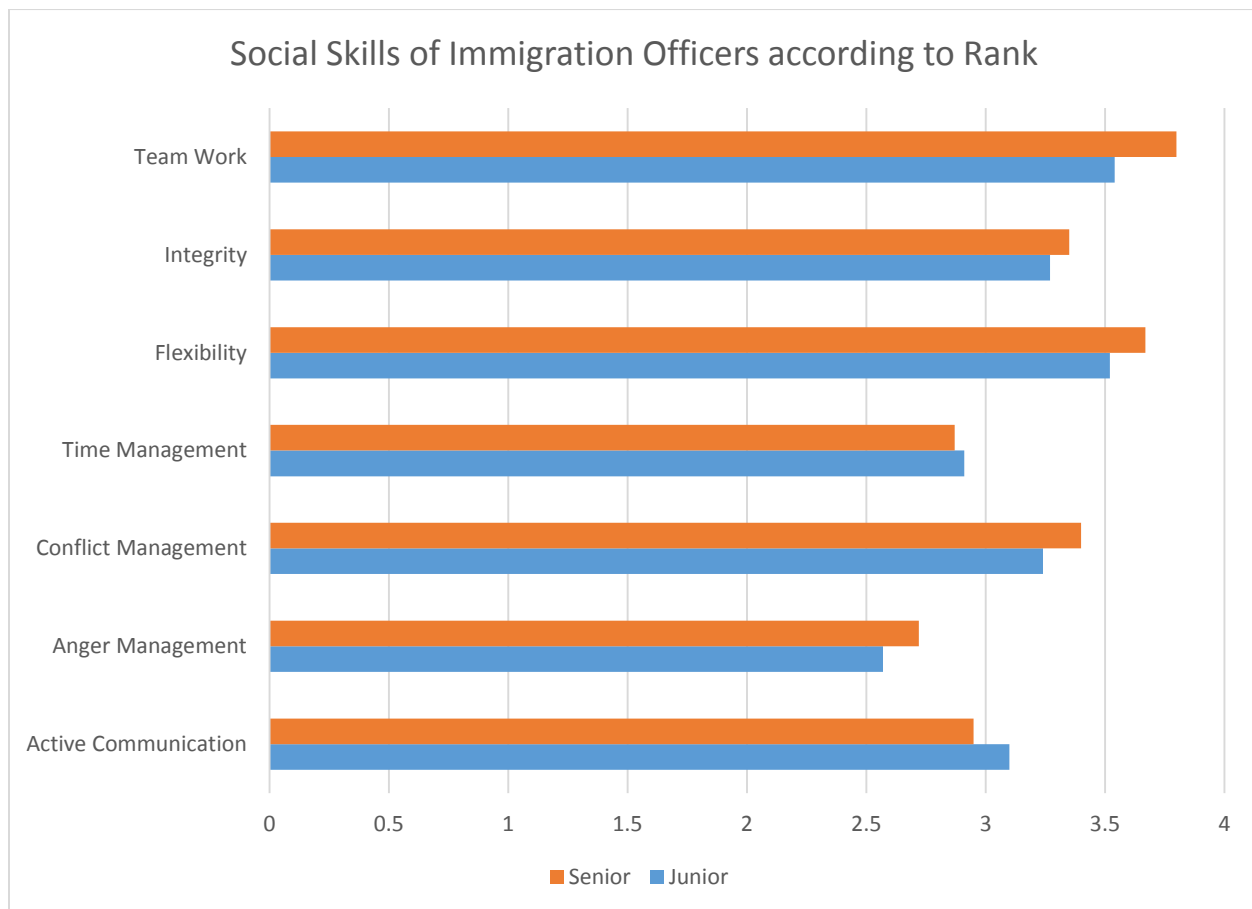




**Research Question Two:** What is the prevalence of social skills among junior and senior immigration officers in Rivers State Command?

s/n	Item	Junior (N = 70)			Senior (N = 45)		
		Mean	SD	Rank	Mean	SD	Rank
1	Active Communication	3.10	0.83	5 <sup>th</sup>	2.95	0.87	5 <sup>th</sup>
2	Anger Management	2.57	1.06	7 <sup>th</sup>	2.72	0.98	7 <sup>th</sup>
3	Conflict Management	3.24	0.67	4 <sup>th</sup>	3.40	0.66	3 <sup>rd</sup>
4	Time Management	2.91	0.97	6 <sup>th</sup>	2.87	1.15	6 <sup>th</sup>
5	Flexibility	3.52	0.75	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3.67	0.52	2 <sup>nd</sup>
6	Integrity	3.27	1.05	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3.35	0.80	4 <sup>th</sup>
7	Team Work	3.54	0.72	1 <sup>st</sup>	3.80	0.46	1 <sup>st</sup>
		3.16	0.72		3.25	0.77	

The result of the analysis showed that the most prevalent social skill for both junior (3.54) and senior officers (3.80) was team work. This was closely followed by flexibility which junior officers reported a mean value of 3.52 and senior staff a mean value 3.67. For junior staff, the third most prevalent social skill was integrity, while for senior staff it was conflict management. For junior staff, conflict management, was the fourth most prevalent social skill, while for senior staff, integrity was the 4<sup>th</sup> most prevalent social skill. For both junior and senior staff, active communication was the 5<sup>th</sup> prevalent social skill. For both junior and senior officers, time management and anger management occupied sixth and seventh position respectively. From the result obtained, it can be seen that the grand mean for senior officers (3.25) was higher than junior officers (3.16). This indicates that there is a greater prevalence of social skills among senior officers than junior officers. The result obtained is presented pictorial in figure 2



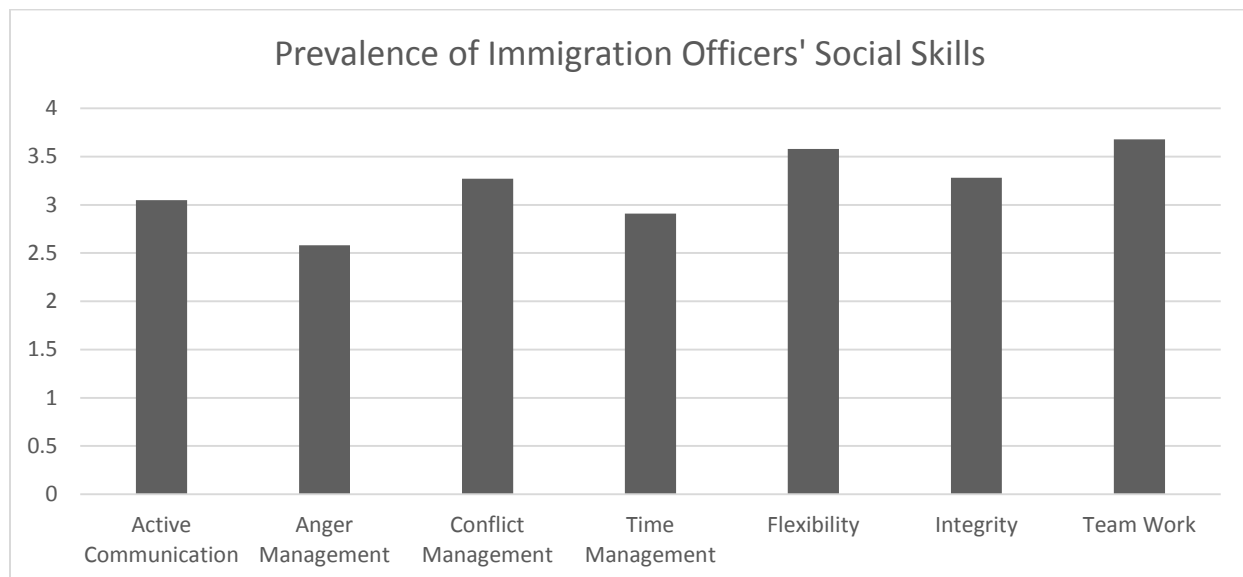
The bar graph above further shows that in all the social skills considered, senior staff displayed a higher mean value than junior staff, with the exception of time management and active communication.



**Research Question Three:** What is the prevalence of social skills among immigration officers in Rivers State Command?

Table 3: Prevalence of social skills among immigration officers

s/n	Item	Immigration Officers (N = 115)		
		Mean	SD	Rank
1	Active Communication	3.05	0.84	5 <sup>th</sup>
2	Anger Management	2.58	1.00	7 <sup>th</sup>
3	Conflict Management	3.27	0.69	4 <sup>th</sup>
4	Time Management	2.91	1.03	6 <sup>th</sup>
5	Flexibility	3.58	0.72	2 <sup>nd</sup>
6	Integrity	3.28	0.88	3 <sup>rd</sup>
7	Team Work	3.68	0.65	1 <sup>st</sup>
		3.19	0.72	



From the data obtained from the analysis conducted and the result displayed in figure 3, the result showed that the highest ranked social skills among immigration officers was team work (mean = 3.68, SD = 0.65), followed by flexibility (mean = 3.58, SD = 0.72), integrity (mean = 3.28, SD = 0.88), conflict management (mean = 3.27, SD = 0.69), active communication (mean = 3.05, SD = 0.84), time management (mean = 2.91, SD = 1.03) and lastly anger management (mean = 2.58, SD = 1.00). Generally, a grand mean of 3.19 (SD = 0.72) was obtained which indicates that there is a high prevalence of social skills among immigration officers in Rivers State.

## DISCUSSION OF RESULT

The result from the study showed that generally male immigration officers displayed a higher prevalence of social skills than female officers. This result suggest that in their day to day activities, male officers are more likely to utilize social skills in the execution of their duties than female immigration officers. However this was not across board as in some social skills females reported a greater prevalence of social skills than males such as in active communication, flexibility and integrity. The result from this study is similar to that obtained by Pucjak, Valencic, Jana and Cirili (2009) who found out that male students displayed a higher level of social skills than female students in primary and secondary schools in Slovenia. However, this study differ from the present one in that the assessment of social skills was done using students in schools as against the usage of immigration officers as the sample.

The result of the analysis reveal that senior officers reported a higher prevalence of social skills than junior officers. This result indicates that generally, senior officers are more inclined to utilize social skills in the execution of their daily duties and responsibilities than junior officers. This result is not surprising because those in the senior cadre have attended various courses and programmes where attention is not focused on technical skills but on the acquisition of leadership skills. Also as an individual grows in the job technical skill although important, is over taken by the need to effectively manage people therefore the increasing



importance of social skills. This result is similar to that obtained by Riggio and Reichard (2008) who found out that top level managers displayed higher social and emotional skills such as leadership, courtesy and professionalism than junior level officers.

### Recommendations

From the result obtained, the following recommendations were made:

1. The result from the study showed that social skills was highly prevalent among immigration officers. Therefore effort should be made to recognized those who are exceptionally socially skilled and rewarded in order to promote social skills among officers.
2. Social skill assessment should be an integral aspect of the recruitment procedure for the intake of immigration officers.
3. Specialized training and course should be integrated into the orientation programme provided for new recruits into the immigration service.
4. Regular assessment of social skills among immigration officers should be implemented to enable the identification of those with deficiencies in order to provide specialized training for them.

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