IMPARTING DIGITAL SKILLS AS A VERITABLE TOOL FOR PROMOTING COMPETENCIES IN BUSINESS EDUCATION GRADUATES IN CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

The paper examined the impartation of digital skills, as a veritable tool for promoting competencies in Business Education graduates in Cross River State, Nigeria. Two specific purposes, two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The study used descriptive survey research design. The population for the study was all the business education lecturers in the four public tertiary institutions in Cross River State, which gave a total of 92 lecturers. There was no need for sampling since the population size was small and manageable. Instrument for data collection was researchers' structured questionnaire titled "Impacting Digital Skills as a Veritable Tool for Promoting Competencies in Business Education Students Questionnaire (IDSVTPBESQ)". The questionnaire was validated by two business educators and one expert in Test and Measurement to ascertain the face and content validity. To ascertain the reliability of the instrument, a pre-test was carried out using 20 lecturers from University of Uyo which is not part of the population. The data collected was analysed using Cronbach alpha reliability index which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.82. The instrument was administered to the respondents. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while independent t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the findings revealed that various digital skills are relevant in promoting competencies in Business Education graduates. It was concluded that imparting digital skills for promoting competencies in business education students is paramount, to empower these students for favourable competitiveness in work and business world upon graduation. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that Business Education curriculum should be reviewed regularly to incorporate current digital skills to ensure lecturers impartation of emerging digital skills to Business Education students.

Keywords: Digital skills, Business Education, Competencies, Veritable tool

Introduction

The high rate of technology advancement has rendered some skills obsolete, such skills are no longer relevant in the world of work and business. This technology advancement has also changed the entire world economy, introducing the practice of digital economy globally. The digital economy has restructured the method of doing business and work from manual (analogue) to digital method. The digitalization of every sector of human endeavour has placed demand on emerging skills to keep pace with the development of work and business. According to IFC (2021), this technological advancement is regarded as fourth industrial evolution which has both negative and positive effects whereby majority of low-productivity jobs are at highest risk of disruption.

In the words of Okolocha (2010), digital form of Information Communication Technology has altered everything about education, replacing many commonly practiced methods and techniques of teaching and learning with technology-oriented methods. Owing to

this situation, every society demands on its education system for supply of the needed skills and competencies to cope with work and business challenges globally. Ikelegbe (2019) emphasized that education in any society cannot be relevant without effective preparation of new generation of students to effectively use the modern technologies in their professional practices. Business education as one of the educational programmes, according to Azih and Wgsbara (2017) is a medium for empowering learners especially the youths for sustainable livelihood and social-economic development. Okereke (2015) sees Business Education as a vital part of development of an individual's life, it opens doors to excellent career opportunities and part of formal education which consists of systematic instruction, teaching and training of teachers. Also, Business Education according to Nwosu in Otum (2018) simply means education for business vocation/occupation and about business. Education for business vocation involves the preparation of learners with skills, knowledge, competences, abilities, values and experiences needed to function effectively in a specific business occupation. While education about business involves imparting business knowledge, ideas, understanding, and information needed to become an intelligent consumer of economic goods and services. Business Education is a programme of study that inculcates into the students requisite skills, knowledge, attitude and experiences needed to perform office and business occupation either as an employee or an entrepreneur. This definition explains that Business Education programme is expected to discover the skill needs of its society and proffer strategies for satisfy such needs. Looking at the present skill needs situation of the industries and workplaces; digital skill is considered as the most relevant skills in the society.

Digital skills are emerging complex skills required for effective utilization of emerging technologies. UNESCO (2020) defines digital skills as those skills needed to use digital devices, communication applications and networks to access and manage information. Digital skills are the emerging skills needed for effective electronic activities. Digital skills are classified into three categories according to IFC (2021) namely: basic digital skills (ability to access and use technologies to perform basic task, online communication, finding, managing and store digital information), intermediate digital skills (such as ability to use technology to perform work related task, ability to use professional software for presentation, analytics, accounting and project management, Electronic marketing and social media analytics, web design and graphic design) and advance digital skills (such as, cloud computing skill, network management, artificial intelligence, data science, large data analysis, cyber security, web development and search engine optimization). UNESCO (2017) classified digital skills into basic digital skills and advanced digital skills. Basic digital skills are regarded as online skills needed for foundational online activities. Basic digital skills include fundamental ability to utilize modern technologies, communication skill, ability to handle and save information, ability to transact online business, ability to use online application software to solve problems, ability to understand legal practices of handling data, viruses, and password. Advanced digital skills include Pay-Per-Click (PPC) marketing skills, online advertising skill, email marketing skill, social media skill, search engine optimization skill, user experience skill, web analytics skill, artificial intelligence skill, video production skill, Customer Relationship Management (CRM) software skill, benchmarking skill and audience segmentation skill. Other advanced Digital skills include networking skill, digital product management skill, online marketing, programming skill, cloud computing skills, ability to do online business, ability to play online games, web and app development (Boot strap, JQuery, Angular, Code Igniter, PHP/Java Script, and MySQL) and Omni-channel business. Digital skills help students to build their critical thinking ability and increase students' creativity and logical reasoning.

Competency as viewed by Ezeabii, Nwokike and Jim (2018), is the ability to perform task successfully use knowledge, skills attitude and experience. Competencies are the specific skills and knowledge required for successful accomplishment of a task. Competencies are the attributes that qualify a person to perform a task. The competencies acquired in the school, form

the major human capital needed by an individual to succeed in business and workplaces. Imparting digital skills will empower students with adequate human capital for favourable competition in business and environment. Since the world is currently digitalized, Business education is expected to empower its recipients with current competencies required to achieve a goal in business and workplace. This can be possible through the impartation of digital skills to the business education students. In support of this, Browles–Gintis in Otum (2018) commented that the main role of Business Education is to instil in students the current ideology and approach towards life. Ntukidem in Olufunwa, Waziri & Olorunmolu. (2013) asserted that Business Education has a definite role in preparing and equipping students with skills that increase their chances of finding a job after schooling as well as creating their own employment through business. This ideology makes imparting digital skills in Business Education imperative. It is based on that note that the researchers carried out the study on imparting digital skills as a veritable tool in promoting competencies in business education graduates.

Statement of the Problem

The unpleasant jobless situation of Nigerian youths coupled with the high rate of downsizing of human resource by different companies have resulted to increase in poverty and crime rate. Also, the miserliness nature of industries in terms of constant demand for emerging skills and job competences has become a treat to chances of business education graduates' employability. Furthermore, many graduates have established different forms of business but due to lack of business competences among them, those businesses collapsed within one year. To salvage these situations, many educational institutions have step up their programme by reviewing the curriculum of existing programmes and providing additional programmes. Government has also established additional higher institutions and created entrepreneurship education for undergraduates. Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) have also established different free skill acquisition programmes. It has been observed that despite all these efforts made to empower the youths with adequate relevant skills, graduates of business education are still not engaged in the world work and business, due to poor skills and job competencies among them. The researchers presumed that imparting digital skills could be a veritable tool for promoting competencies among business education undergraduates.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to examine the imparting of digital skills as a veritable tool for promoting competencies in business education graduates in Cross-River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study was to:

1. Identify various digital skills required by business education graduates.
2. Examine the relevance of digital skills in promoting competencies in business education graduates.

Research Questions

1. What are the various digital skills required by business education students?
3. What are the relevance of digital skills in promoting competencies in Business Education students?

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female lecturers in the institutions various digital skills required by business education graduates.
2. There is no significant difference between the responses of lecturers in universities and colleges of education on relevance of digital skills in promoting competencies in business education graduates.

Research Methodology

The study used descriptive design. The study was conducted in Cross River which houses four public tertiary institutions that offer business education namely: University of Calabar, University of Cross River State, Federal College of Education, Obudu, College of education, Akampka. The population of the study was all the lecturers in the four public tertiary institutions which include University of Calabar – (38 lecturers). University of Cross River State-(26 lecturers), Federal College of Education, Obudu-(19 lecturers), College of Education, Akamkpa- (15 lecturers) giving a total of 98 lecturers. There was no need for sampling since the population size was small and manageable. The instrument for data collection was researchers' structured questionnaire titled "Impacting Digital Skills as a Veritable Tool for Promoting Competencies in Business Education Students Questionnaire (IDSVTPBESQ)" with four rating scale namely: "Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree". The instrument contained 20 items for digital skills and 20 items for relevance of digital skills representing a total of 40 items. The questionnaire was validated by two business educators and one expert in test and measurement to ascertain the face and content validity. The suggestions and corrections helped to improve the quality of the instrument. To ascertain the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was carried out using 20 lecturers from University of Uyo which was not part of the population. The data collected were analysed using Cronbach alpha reliability statistical tool which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.82. The instrument was finally administered to the population using on the spot delivery and retrieval as well as mailing method of data collection. Out of 98 copies printed, 92 copies were successfully administered and retrieved which yielded a returning rate of 93.87%. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer research questions. . A cut-off score of 2.5 was used as a benchmark for Agree or Disagree of each of the item statement as digital skills and its relevance. The implication, therefore, was that each item of the instrument with a mean of 2.50 and above was regarded as one of the digital skills and relevance of digital skills. On the other hand, items with mean values less than 2.50 were not digital skills and relevance of digital skills. To test the hypothesis, independent T-test statistical tool was used at 0.05 level of significance. The decision for testing hypotheses was that if the calculated p-value less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted. Conversely, if the calculated p-value is equal to or above 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Results

Research Question 1

What are the various digital skills required by business education graduates for promoting competencies?

Data collected with items 1 to 20 of the instrument were used to answer this research question. Summary of results is presented on Table1.

Table 1: Mean Ratings on the various digital skills required by business education graduates. **(N=92).**

S/N	Items On Various Digital Skills	Female Mean	Sd	Rmks	Male Mean	Sd	Rmks
1	Online product management skill	3.01	0.77	Agree	3.41	0.71	Agree
2	Web and App development skill	2.97	0.72	Agree	3.13	0.72	Agree
3	Web design and graphic design skill	3.31	0.69	Agree	3.27	0.76	Agree
4	Cloud Computing skill	3.05	0.67	Agree	3.02	0.86	Agree
5	Ability to do online business	3.18	0.74	Agree	2.86	0.61	Agree
6	Ability to play online game	3.62	0.85	Agree	3.41	0.70	Agree
7	Word programming skill	4.01	0.83	Agree	3.22	0.86	Agree
8	Ability to use modern technology to perform work related tasks	3.01	0.73	Agree	3.43	0.69	Agree
9	Ability to use professional software for presentation,	3.40	0.72	Agree	3.37	0.74	Agree
10	Analytics, accounting and project management.	3.62	0.81	Agree	3.44	0.76	Agree
11	Network management skill	2.88	0.88	Agree	3.07	0.84	Agree
12	Artificial intelligence	3.33	0.68	Agree	3.18	0.77	Agree
13	Cyber security skill	3.52	0.88	Agree	3.51	0.72	Agree
14	Search engine optimization skill	2.97	0.82	Agree	3.04	0.78	Agree
15	Social media analytics skill	4.02	0.90	Agree	3.27	0.82	Agree
16	Online teaching skill	3.45	0.71	Agree	3.33	0.68	Agree
17	Customer relationship management software skills	3.58	0.81	Agree	3.16	0.69	Agree
18	Online benchmarking skill.	3.33	0.60	Agree	3.40	0.81	Agree
19	Audience segmentation skill	3.41	0.74	Agree	3.12	0.85	Agree
20	Online market segmentation skill	3.08	0.62	Agree	3.16	0.73	Agree
	GRAND MEAN	**3.34**	**0.76**	**Agree**	**3.24**	**0.76**	**Agree**

As shown in the table 1, all the items showed a mean rating of more 2.50 which indicated that the respondents agreed to all the items as digital skills required by Business Education graduates. Also, there is a homogeneity in items among Business Educators responses indicating a consensus.

Research Question 2

What is the relevance of digital skills in promoting competencies among Business Education graduates.

Data collected with items 21 to 40 of the instrument were used to answer this research question. Summary of results is presented on Table2.

Table 2: Mean Ratings on the relevance of digital skills in promoting competencies in Business Education graduates.

S/N	Items On Relevance Of Digital Skills	Frmale Mean	SD	Rmks	Male Mean	SD	Rmks
21	Digital skills help entrepreneur to develop competitive advantage	2.97	0.68	Agree	3.23	0.62	Agree
22	Digital skills help to create new jobs	3.10	0.74	Agree	3.07	0.71	Agree
23	Digital skills help to improve students' communication skills	3.13	0.71	Agree	3.25	0.73	Agree
24	Digital skills serve as advanced skills needed by all citizens	3.27	0.88	Agree	3.39	0.67	Agree
25	Imparting digital skills raises students' awareness of the digital competences.	3.18	0.74	Agree	4.08	0.92	Agree
26	Imparting digital skills helps to empower students for successful competition in the labour market.	3.57	0.89	Agree	3.23	0.62	Agree
27	Imparting digital skills ensures the improvement of ICT professionals and promote lifelong learning among students	3.41	0.84	Agree	3.28	0.77	Agree
28	Digital skills help graduates build good customer and employee relationship.	3.01	0.73	Agree	3.39	0.79	Agree
29	Impartial digital skills help students to secure online jobs upon graduation	3.52	0.71	Agree	3.17	0.86	Agree
30	Digital skills help graduates to establish online businesses successfully.	2.88	0.88	Agree	3.53	0.82	Agree
31	Digital skills provide graduates with new strategies of managing business successfully.	3.33	0.68	Agree	2.82	0.60	Agree
32	Acquisition of digital skills helps to persuade customers to buy products to increase revenue	3.42	0.82	Agree	3.45	0.73	Agree
33	Digital skills help to improve work productivity	3.97	0.86	Agree	3.51	0.72	Agree
34	Acquisition of digital skills helps to bridge the gap between semi-skilled and skilled labour	3.02	0.79	Agree	3.14	0.80	Agree
35	Digital skills guarantee comparative advantage over	3.45	0.71	Agree	3.27	0.82	Agree

	competitors.						
36	Imparting digital skills help business education programme to keep pace with technology advancement.	3.62	0.81	Agree	3.47	0.65	Agree
37	Digital skills are a major part of human capital needed in the labour market	3.15	0.88	Agree	3.18	0.69	Agree
38	Imparting digital skills helps to promote educational programme.	3.33	0.78	Agree	3.39	0.72	Agree
39	Imparting digital skills gives students a deeper understanding of data processing.	3.41	0.74	Agree	3.28	0.88	Agree
40	Digital skills improve ICT literacy level	3.08	0.62	Agree	3.13	0.82	Agree
	GRAND MEAN	**3.29**	**0.77**	**Agree**	**3.31**	**0.75**	**3.29**

As shown in the table 2, all the items showed a mean rating of more 2.50 which indicated that the respondents agreed to all the items as digital skills required by Business Education graduates. Also, there is homogeneity in items among Business Educators responses indicating a consensus.

Testing the Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1
There is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female Business Education lecturers in the institutions on digital skills required by business education graduates.

Table 3: Summary of T-test comparison of the mean rating of the mean responses of male and female Business Education lecturers in the institutions on digital skills required by business education graduates.

Respondents	**No.**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Df**	**T-cal**	**p-value**	**Level of Sig.**	**Decision**
Male	45	18.32	12.01					
				90	.783	0.0023	0.05	Accepted
Female	47	17.45	11.63					

The data in Table above, the result of the t-test analysis with a t-calculated value of 0.783 (which is greater than t-tabulated value of 1.96) and a P-value of 0.0023 which is less than 0.05 at 0.05 level of significance. Conclusively, the null hypothesis was accepted meaning, there is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female lecturers in the institutions

Research Hypothesis 2
There are no significant differences between the responses of lecturers in universities and colleges of education on relevance of digital skills in promoting competencies in Business Education graduates.

Table 4: Summary of T-test comparison of the mean rating of the responses of lecturers in universities and colleges of education on relevance of digital skills.

Respondents	No.	Mean	SD	Df	T-cal	p-value	Level of Sig.	Decision
University lecturers	60	20.48	18.11	90	.805	0.0013	0.05	Accepted
College of Education lecturers	32	21.05	6.88					

From the data in Table above, the result of the t-test analysis with a t-calculated value of 0.805 (which is greater than t-tabulated value of 1.96) and a P-value of 0.0013 which is less than 0.05 at 0.05 level of significance makes the test significance. This indicates that, the null hypothesis was accepted meaning, there are no significant differences between the responses of lecturers in universities and colleges of education on relevance of digital skills in promoting competencies among Business Education graduates.

Discussion of Findings

The result of analysis of the various digital skills required by business education graduates as shown in table 1, indicated that all the Business Education lecturers agreed to all the items identified as digital skills required by business Education graduates These digital skills include: online product management skill, web and app development skill, web design and graphic design skill, cloud computing and ability to do online business, word programming skill, ability to use modern technology to perform work related tasks, network management skill, cyber security skill, ability to use professional software for presentation, artificial intelligence, and Search engine optimization. This is line with UNESCO (2017) who described digital skills as a range of different abilities, many of which are not only 'skills' per se, but a combination of behaviours, expertise, know-how, work habits, character traits, dispositions, and critical understandings. The finding is also supported by Olayinka and Mamman (2018) who found that internet, application packages, social media, file and folder management are important skills for moving from on-ground to online teaching and learning.

The result of the relevance of digital skills as shown in table 2 revealed that all Business Educators agreed to all the items on relevance of digital skills which includes: imparting digital skills helps to promote Business Education programme, improve ICT literacy level, digital skills help entrepreneurs to develop competitive advantage, digital skills help to create online jobs, digital skill serve as advance skill needed by all citizens, imparting digital skills raises students awareness of digital competencies, digital skills help students secure online job upon graduation , digital skills create new ways of managing businesses and imparting digital skills helps students develop online teaching strategies. The finding is in line with Amesi (2018) who listed importance of skill acquisition to include: self-employment, diverse job prospects, employment generation, operative function, and crime reduction. This is supported by Azih and Wagbara (2018) who recommended that Business Education students should imbibe digital skills which will enable them explore e-business options thereby enhancing their employment.

The result of table 3 revealed that there is no significant difference between the mean responses of male and female Business Education lecturers in the institutions on various digital skills. This implies that all Business Education lecturers attested that there are various digital skills required by Business Education students. This shows that, there is need to impart digital skills to business education students to keep pace with advancement of technologies which promotes competencies among Business Education graduates. The result of table 4 showed that there are no significant differences between the responses of lecturers in universities and colleges of education on relevance of digital skills. This indicates that all lecturers agreed that

digital skills are very important to graduates in promoting competencies and ensure their employment upon graduation and graduates' relevance in the society at large. These skills will help business Education graduates to diversify their activities in the world of work and business thereby improving productivity and sustainability in business and work.

Conclusion

The fast development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) globally has given birth to various skills and competencies. Digital skills are emerging skills required by youths to manipulate modern technologies and internet facilities for easy communication and interaction across the globe. To keep pace with development of modern technologies, imparting digital skills in Business Education is paramount to promote competencies among business education graduates for successful competition in work and business environment.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Stakeholders of Business Education should review its curriculum regularly to incorporate current digital skills to ensure lecturers impartation of emerging digital skills to Business Education graduates.
2. Business Educators should utilize modern instructional technologies in Business Education pedagogy to foster relevance of new technologies and the associated skills to graduates.

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