



INTEGRATING DIGITAL SKILLS IN BUSINESS EDUCATION CURRICULUM IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS FOR DIGITAL ECONOMY DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This study determined the integration of digital skills in business education curriculum in tertiary institutions for digital economy development in Anambra State. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised 102 business educators from four tertiary institutions that offered business education programme in Anambra State. There was no sampling. A 36-item structured questionnaire validated by two experts in the field of business education and measurement and evaluation was used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was established using trial-testing and data collected were analyzed using Cronbach Alpha which yielded coefficient value 0.91. Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test. Findings showed that digital skills were highly needed in business education programme in tertiary institutions for digital economy development. It was further revealed that the identified digital skills were suitable for preparing business education students for digital economy development. The researchers concluded that the curriculum of business education should accommodate digital skills that are critical to the growth of the nation's economy. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that curriculum of business education should be reviewed from time to time to accommodate required digital skills. This will enhance digital skill acquisition of students for job creation.

Keywords: *Digital Economy, Digital Skills, Education, Business Education and Curriculum*

Introduction

Digital technologies have developed rapidly in recent time, changing people access information as well as human interaction and communication. This transformation includes emergence of digital economy. Digital economy refers to an economy that encompasses



businesses that sell goods and services via the internet, and digital platforms that connect spare capacity and demand. The World Economic Forum and the Group of Twenty (G20) (2018) defined the digital economy as a broad range of economic activities comprising all jobs in the digital sector as well as digital occupations in non-digital sectors. The digital economy is estimated to make up around 5% of global GDP and 3% of global employment (Bukht & Heeks 2017). Digital economy has enabled fast revenue growth for many firms; encouraged the shift from tangible flows of physical goods to intangible flows of data and information; enabled firms in developing economies to connect across borders; and has thus facilitated a surge in cross-border data flows. Most importantly, they have also transformed various sectors, impacting global education (business education inclusive) and society.

Business education as a branch of vocational education equips its recipients with relevant skills needed in the world of work. According to Ezenwafor and Onokpaunu (2017), business education programme is a branch of vocational education concerned with exposing its recipients to the internal and external foundations and functioning of the workplace. Business education is a work-focused, skill-based, result-oriented and technology-based educational programme (Ugwoke, 2011). With the knowledge of business education, students are better informed and groomed with skills and understanding to cope with the unpredictable challenges of the business environment. However, business education programme which is charged with the responsibility of unveiling the dynamics of the world of work must ensure that its recipients possess relevant skills needed for effective entry and efficient participation in economic development. Oguejiofor (2020) in support of the above stated that the value of any business education programme could be determined by its ability to adequately prepare and equip individuals in such a manner that they could fit into specific jobs, become technologically relevant, internationally competitive and economically prosperous, if properly packaged and adequately delivered. Extensively, business education is that aspect of general education that prepares students for employment and advancement in a broad range of office occupations, accounting profession, marketing occupation, teaching profession and entrepreneurship venture (Onokpaunu, 2016). However, the reliable medium through which the mission and vision of business education programmes can be achieved, stems from effective review and implementation of its curriculum (Ezenwafor & Onokpaunu, 2017).

Curriculum is the means through which laid down educational philosophy of a nation is translated into concrete reality. It contains prescribed course of studies which students must learn in order to reach a certain level of education. According to Igbe (2016), curriculum is an orderly collection of obligatory, essential and vital subjects included in a specific course programme for studies in a school, college or university. Curriculum is described as an integrated course of academic studies. This however, portrays the fact that so many courses are academically put together to form the curriculum which is subject to review between three to five years (Ohiwerei, 2019).

In addition, Efanimjor and Okolocha (2020) stated that curriculum is responsible for the systematic organisation of formal and informal experiences geared towards facilitating the development of the cognitive, physical, psychomotor and socio-emotional potentials of students. Thus, business education curriculum is a set of learning experiences designed to enable students attain the objectives of business education programme. Correspondingly, Okoro (2015) opined that business education curriculum entails educational training which an individual receives in order to acquire adequate attitudes, concepts, knowledge, understanding and skills in business activities for vocational use in careers as administrators, managers, teachers wherever



one may find oneself in the business world. It is believed that the curriculum of business education exposes students to educational and business related experiences. However, Oguejiofor (2020) reported that curriculum offerings at the tertiary institution levels do not cater for some of the needs of the current century skills. In agreement, Ikpesu (2017) stated that business education in Nigeria is at variance with global digital world. This variance, however portrays a total disconnection between what higher education offer and the needs of the labour market. The challenge here lies on how to ensure that the curriculum and delivery system provide satisfactory output that can compete globally in the labour market. In order to achieve this, there is need for the integration of digital skills in the teaching of business education programme.

Digital skills are a set of technological abilities used to access and manage digital information. According to UNESCO (2018), digital skills are a range of abilities to use digital devices, communication applications, and networks to access and manage information. They enable people to create and share digital content, communicate and collaborate, and solve problems for effective and creative self-fulfillment in life, learning, work and social activities at large. Ferrari (2013) saw digital skills as the ability to critically analyse and assess digital information, problem solving through the use of digital tools, creation and recreation of content and so forth. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) (2018) defined digital skills as a set of technological abilities that may be fully or partially acquired before entering the world of work.

In the context of this study, digital skills are the abilities of using digital technologies to transform existing traditional and non-digital business processes and services, or creating new ones, to meet evolving market and customer expectations. Some digital skills are required to use and interact with technology in order to fulfil specific tasks, while others are required to design, create and maintain tools and solutions for different industries. ITU (2018) categorized these skills as: basic digital skills, intermediate digital skills and advanced digital skills.

Basic digital skills are the fundamental skills needed to use digital technologies, such as using a browser, connecting to the internet, and keeping passwords secure. The skills are required for effective use of ICT tools, system and devices to support task/functions. Basic digital skills foster competency in interaction with basic digital tools. Basic skills level cover the hardware and software know-how required to use various technological assets such as computers, smartphones, software (word processors, applications), online operations (Internet, search engines, social networks, e-commerce, privacy) and communication media (Laar, Dijka, & Haan, 2020).

The Intermediate digital skills are skills needed to configure digital tools to produce and consume digital content or enhance digital tools through basic programming skills. Intermediate skills can also benefit from basic knowledge of programming language, such as spreadsheet manipulation through Visual Basic macro programming or front-end web design that is HTML- and JavaScript-dependent, or other languages that are specific to particular domains (accounting, enterprise resource planning, among others).

Advanced digital skills on the other hand are skills needed for researching, developing, designing, producing, installing, managing and maintenance of ICT software and system. It is enhanced knowledge acquired through specific curriculum aspects to improve technological proficiency, programming skills and advanced aspects of specific digital branches (advanced programming, machine learning, Internet of things (IoT), networking, engineering, hardware design, among others). Examples of advanced digital skills include science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and social, mobility, analytics and cloud (SMAC).



The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2015) identified digital skill as digital foundation skills, communication skills, information skills, content creation skills, safety skills, transacting skills and problem solving skills. Digital foundation skill is the ability to use digital technologies, such as using a browser, connecting to the internet, and keeping passwords secure. Communicating skill is the ability in sending emails securely, using attachments, and participating on social media. Information and content creation skill is the ability in using search engines and accessing content across devices. It is the ability to evaluate information. Transacting skill is the ability to set up accounts to use or purchase goods/services online, using different secure payment methods, filling in online forms. Safety skill is the ability for data storage/sharing, updating and keeping passwords secure, and taking precautions against viruses. Problem-solving skill is the ability to find solutions to problems using tutorials/chat, presenting solutions through software, and improving productivity.

Alyoubi (2015) noted that students need digital skills for effective participation in the development of digital economy. The World Economic Forum (2018) reported that digital skills are required for the development of every sector of economy (such as health, agriculture, finance, transportation, education, construction, tourism, information and communication technology industries among others). The ITU (2020) in support of the above stated that digital skills are highly required to participate in the labour market and recommended that digital skills should be embedded in education and training, to enable individuals to participate fully in modern digital economy, whether as technology specialists, leaders of digitally-enabled businesses or workers in digitally-enabled jobs across the economy. Okoye (2017) in corroboration, stated that basic ICT skills should be embedded into business education curriculum in higher institutions in order to prepare students for global work competition. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2015) equally stated that for higher education to be a beacon for digital skills provision, there is need to provide high quality training standards for teachers and students and ensure that digital skills are learned pervasively at all stages of education and training. Brandes and Zobrist (2017) observed that digital knowledge provides platforms that allow one to connect and collaborate. It opens up opportunities to learn about new and important issues, and empowers innovations.

In business education in particular, digital skills extends to all aspects of teaching and learning, and help students to acquire basic digital skills and knowledge. Bakhshi, Downing, Osborne and Schneider (2017) in their view, stated that in general, educational institutions and teachers should continue to incorporate strategies for providing technical, managerial, personal and social skills to create digital citizens (people who use digital technology purposefully and confidently to communicate, find information and purchase goods/services); digital workers (people who have the ability to evaluate, configure and use complex digital systems and digital makers (people with the skills to build digital technology – typically software development). Laar, Dijka, Alexander and Haan (2020) noted that the academic world as well as other sectors are tremendously adopting different electronic means for the development of digital skills or tools for education and job market in the teaching and learning environment. The idea is to fulfill the need of students and teachers and between students and students and made them aware of all digital tools that are crucial for learning and growth in the digital age. However, Orji, Ali and OKanazu (2015) revealed that digital skills are required in technology and vocational education to boost the digital literacy of teachers and students. Tripathy (2019) also noted that digital skills required in this new digital economy must be taught to the students to minimize the risk of digital skills gap. However, Okolocha and Ile (2012) posited that comprehensive and systematic transformation of



business education programme must occur to address the challenges of preparing well qualified individuals for the development of the nation.

Business educators should therefore equip themselves with new technological skills needed to train students to fit into the demands of modern business world. Effective teaching of digital skills in business education will adequately equip business education graduates with relevant ICT skills needed to establish and manage their personal business enterprises more profitably for the development of required digital economy.

Statement of the Problem

In the current phase of technological changes in the business world, students should be properly equipped with necessary ICT skills to enable them be successful future drivers of the economy. These new skills are in the areas of technological assets such as computers, smartphones, software applications, online operations and communication media web-based initiatives among others. In business education the situation is the same. As the world is going digital there is need for business education students to acquire the right digital skills needed to meet up with the modern economy. This can only be achieved when students move with current trends in technological advancement which is reflected in the changing patterns of business education curriculum. Policymakers, researchers and educational stakeholders alike are beginning to recognize that closing this digital skills gap is essential for preparing the nations' educational sector (especially business education) for development of digital economy. Therefore, to close this gap, there is the need for the integration of digital skills into the business education curriculum in tertiary institutions to produce competent and skillful individuals that can compete with their counterparts globally in the ever changing technological world.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to ascertain digital skills needed to integrate into business education curriculum in tertiary institutions for digital economy development. Specifically, the study:

1. Determine the digital skills needed by business education students for digital economy development.
2. Ascertain the extent to which identified digital skills are suitable for digital economy development.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the digital skills needed by business education students for digital economy development?
2. To what extent are the identified skills suitable for digital economy development?

Null Hypotheses

H01: Business educators do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on digital skills needed by business education students for digital economy development based on school type.

H02: Business educators do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on digital skills suitable for digital economy development based on school type (Colleges of Education and Universities)



Method

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of 102 business educators from four tertiary institutions offering business education courses in Anambra State. The whole population was studied because the population was not too large. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “Digital Skills Needed by Business Education Students for Digital Economy Development (DSNBESDED)”. The questionnaire was divided into two-parts. A and B. Part A was designed to elicit demographic information of the respondents such as school type. The instrument was developed based on a modified 4-points likert of Highly Needed (HN-4), Needed (N-3), Fairly Needed (FN-2) and Not Needed (NN-1) and Very Great Extent (VGE-4), Great Extent (GE-3), Small Extent (SE-2) and To No Extent (TNE-1). The instrument was validated by two experts in the field of business education and one experts in measurement and evaluation. Trial testing method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument using 20 business education lecturers outside the study area who were not part of the study. Data collected were analyzed using Cronbach Alpha which yielded an overall coefficient value of 0.91. The researcher personally administered copies of the questionnaire with the help of two research assistants adequately briefed. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and t-test was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question One

What are the digital skills needed by business education students for digital economy development?

Table 1: Respondents’ mean ratings of digital skills needed to prepare business education students for digital economy development.

S/N	Digital skills for digital economy development	Mean	SD	Remark
Information Skills:				
1	Browsing, searching and filtering information ability	3.77	0.51	Highly needed
2	Storing and retrieving information ability	3.67	0.53	Highly needed
3	Access contents across devices ability	3.97	0.56	Highly needed
4	Creating personal information strategies ability	3.52	0.47	Highly needed
5	Evaluating information ability	3.96	0.19	Highly needed
Communication Skills:				
6	Interacting with different technologies ability	3.57	0.63	Highly needed
7	Sharing information and content ability	3.74	0.56	Highly needed
8	Engaging in online citizenship ability	3.69	0.52	Highly needed
9	Corroborating through digital channels ability	3.76	0.54	Highly needed
10	Managing digital identity ability	3.67	0.53	Highly needed
11	Having behavioural norms in online interactions ability	3.95	0.20	Highly needed
Content Creation Skills:				
12	Developing content ability	3.21	0.46	Needed
13	Integrating and re-elaborating digital content ability	3.22	0.49	Needed
14	Copyright and licences ability	3.00	0.40	Needed
15	Programing ability	3.14	0.58	Needed
Safety Skills:				



16	Protecting devices ability	3.18	0.48	Needed
17	Protecting personal data ability	3.23	0.49	Needed
18	Protecting health ability	3.36	0.54	Needed
19	Protecting the environment ability	3.14	0.57	Needed
	Problem Solving Skills:			
20	Solving technical problem ability	3.69	0.55	Highly Needed
21	Identifying needs and technology responses ability	3.84	0.65	Highly Needed
22	Innovating and creatively using technology ability	3.75	0.54	Highly Needed
23	Identifying digital competence gaps ability	3.82	0.46	Highly Needed
	Digital Business skills:			
24	Data analytics ability	3.86	0.57	Highly Needed
25	Business analysis ability	3.82	0.63	Highly Needed
26	Design and data visualization ability	3.81	0.63	Highly Needed
27	Product management ability	3.73	0.53	Highly Needed
28	Digital marketing ability	3.73	0.52	Highly Needed
29	Social medial ability	3.79	0.48	Highly Needed
30	Copyright and plagiarism ability	3.69	0.56	Highly Needed
Cluster mean		3.61	0.51	HN

Data in Table 1 shows that items 1-11, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29 and 30 are highly needed with mean scores 3.00 and above, while the other items are simply needed. The cluster mean score of 3.61 shows that the respondents agreed that the identified digital skills are seriously needed for preparing graduates of business education for digital economy development.

Research Question Two

To what extent are the identified skills suitable for digital economy development?

Table 2: Respondents' mean ratings of the extent identified skills are suitable for preparing business education student for effective digital economy development.

S/N	Digital skills suitable for digital economy development	Mean	SD	Remark
31	Information skills	3.88	0.74	Very Great Extent
32	Communication skills	3.74	0.54	Very Great Extent
33	Content creation skills	3.10	0.50	Great Extent
34	Safety skills	3.08	0.49	Great Extent
35	Problem skills	3.76	0.67	Very Great Extent
36	Business skills	3.84	0.65	Very Great Extent
Cluster Mean		3.57	0.60	VGE

Data in Table 2 with cluster mean of 3.57 indicate that identified digital skills are very greatly suitable for preparing graduates of business education for digital economy development.

Hypothesis One

Business educators do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the digital skills needed by business education students for digital economy development based on school type.



Table 3: Summary of t-test analysis of mean ratings of colleges of education and universities business educators on the digital skills needed by business education students for digital economy development in Anambra State.

Variable	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	t-value	P-value	Decision
College of Education	74	3.64	0.52	100	0.37	0.96	Accepted
University	28	3.58	0.50				

Data in Table 3 show that t-value of 0.37 at 100 degree of freedom with p-value of 0.96, is greater than the criterion value of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This means that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of business educators in colleges of education and universities on the digital skills needed by business education students for digital economy development.

Hypothesis Two

Business educators do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on digital skills suitable for digital economy development based on school type.

Table 4: Summary of t-test analysis of mean ratings of colleges of education and universities business educators on the extent to which the identified digital skills suitable for preparing business education students for digital economy development in Anambra State.

Variable	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	t-value	P-value	Decision
College of Education	74	3.59	0.62	100	0.35	0.79	Accepted
University	28	3.55	0.58				

Data in Table 4 show that t-value of 0.35 at 100 degree of freedom is greater than the criterion value of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is upheld. This means that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of business educators in colleges of education and universities on the extent to which identified digital skills suitable for preparing business education students for digital economy development.

Discussion

The results of this study revealed that digital skills are highly needed in business education programme in tertiary institutions for digital economy development. This is in consonance with Orji, Ali and Okanazu (2015) who stated that digital skills are highly required in vocational education in tertiary institutions to boost the digital literacy of teachers and students. Moreso, business education as a skilled programme is expected to produce graduates fortified and prepared for digital economy development. In support of the above, Okoye (2017) advocated that basic ICT skills should be embedded in the business education curriculum in higher institutions in order to prepare students for global work competition.



The identified digital skills in this study were needed to a very great extent to acquire capability and skills for digital economy development. This is in line with the report of the International Telecommunication Union (2020), that digital skills are highly required to participate in the labour market and recommended that digital skills should be embedded in education and training, to enable individuals participate fully in the modern digital economy, whether as technology specialists, leaders of digitally-enabled businesses or workers in digitally-enabled jobs across the economy. Digital literacy helps to boost students engagement in technology education and as well helps students stand out from their competition in the job market. Therefore, business educators should equip themselves with the new technological skills needed to train students to fit into the demands of modern business world. In agreement, Bakhshi, Downing, Osborne and Schneider (2017) asserted that educational institutions and teachers should continue to incorporate strategies for providing technical, managerial, personal and social skills to create digital citizens, digital workers and digital makers for transformation of digital economy.

Conclusion

Digital skills are required for the development of every sector of economy. Effective skills in using technology, combined with the knowledge and competencies to innovate, can increase the matching of digital skills to the needs of the digital economy. Employers of labour expect certain skills from every prospective graduate employees for effective job performance and efficiency. Digital skills can also help graduates to become self-employed as digital entrepreneur and as well for creation of employment for others. The findings of this study revealed that digital skills are highly needed in business education curriculum for digital economy development. The researchers concluded that the curriculum of business education should accommodate digital skills for the transformation of digital economy.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. The curriculum of business education should be review from time to time to accommodate digital skills needed by students. This will enhance digital skill acquisition of students for job creation.
2. There should be provision for periodic retraining of business educators to update their knowledge in the various areas of ICT and in the use of ICT. This will expose them to modern trends in technology across the globe and enhance effective teaching.
3. Curriculum implementers should encourage and inspire students to acquire various digital skills. This will help to boost the students' digital competencies upon graduation.
4. The National Universities Commission (NUC) and the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) should work with industry to understand digital skills that are of particular strategic importance to the development of nation economy. This is will help to align the programmes of business education in tertiary institutions with the real-world work practices.

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