SKILL ACQUISITION IN BUSINESS EDUCATION: ISSUES, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE DIGITAL ERA

Prof. Ugonwa Felicia Umeh
Department of Business Education
Faculty of Education and Arts
Madonna University Nigeria, Okija, Anambra State
e-mail: ugonwafelicia@gmail.com
Tel.: +2348037616297

Abstract

The digital era has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of business, creating an urgent need for the workforce to be equipped with new and dynamic skills. Thus, the paper discussed business education skills in the digital age. A three-stage model was used to discuss the stages of skill acquisition that can be adopted in business education for skills development. The paper equally examined the issues in business education programmes in the digital era such as curriculum gaps in business education, pedagogical challenges in business education and faculty development and training. The paper also highlights the significant gap between traditional curricula and the skills demanded by modern employers. Furthermore, the paper discussed leveraging digital technologies and its opportunities for enhanced learning and employability. The paper suggests that the curricula should be regularly reviewed and updated in collaboration with industry experts to ensure alignment with current and future workforce needs; business educators should embrace learner-centered, experiential learning as their teaching methods; and institutions should provide ongoing professional development and training opportunities for educators to enhance their digital competencies and pedagogical skills.

Keywords: Skill Acquisition, Business Education, Digital Era and Curriculum Gaps

Introduction

Business education is a dynamic field of study that equips individuals with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to navigate and excel in the diverse world of business, both as employees and entrepreneurs. It is broadly recognized as a crucial component of vocational education, aiming to produce competent and adaptable professionals capable of contributing to economic development and managing their personal economic affairs effectively (Ezeyi & Ochoma, 2020). But the rapid evolution of technology in the 21st century has profoundly reshaped the global economy, creating a new business landscape defined by digitalization, automation, and interconnectedness. This transformation has necessitated a corresponding shift in the skills required for success in the modern workplace, moving beyond traditional business competencies to encompass a new array of digital proficiencies. Consequently, business education, which has historically prepared students with the knowledge and abilities for professional roles, faces a critical imperative to adapt its curriculum and pedagogical approaches to remain relevant (Edokpolor & Egbri, 2017).

Skill acquisition is the process of obtaining new ideas and knowledge over the time to enhance one's understanding and application of concepts. Skill acquisition in business education involves developing the skills needed to navigate and thrive in the workplace.

Umeh and Iyoha (2024) viewed skill acquisition in business education as the process of developing expertise in various business-related areas, enabling individuals to become self-reliant and more employable. It is a systematic development of skills that promotes efficiency and effectiveness in business-related tasks. This includes the acquisition of knowledge, attributes, and competencies needed for effective personal and business management, as well as

contributing to the broader economy. Skill acquisition is essential in the digital era. Digital era also known as the information age, is the current period characterized by the widespread use of digital technologies, particularly computers, the internet, and mobile devices. It is marked by the rapid digitalization of information, the rise of social media, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things.

Manjunath (2019) opined that the demand for a digitally competent workforce has exposed a notable digital skills gap where the competencies of graduates do not fully align with the needs of employers. In the view of Ikenga and Okpuzor (2025), modern businesses require graduates who are proficient in digital marketing, data analytics, cloud computing, and cybersecurity, as well as possessing crucial soft skills like critical thinking and adaptability. Emesoba and Ariwodo (2023) assert that the digital era calls for continuous acquisition of new skills and updating of existing skills in order to align with the global trend. According to them, the use of digital knowledge gives people access to huge amount of information which has necessitated the acquisition of a new set of skills to access, manage, integrate and evaluate information.

Nevertheless, the integration of these skills into business education curricula is fraught with challenges, and issues such as inadequate funding, lack of modern technological infrastructure, and the need for continuous professional development for educators (Ajisafe et al., 2015; Ogungbo et al., 2024). In the word of Livkovic and Rojko (2022), the persistent digital divide can limit equitable access to technology for all students, potentially exacerbating social and economic inequalities.

Despite these obstacles, the digital era presents unprecedented opportunities for business education. Wul et al. (2020) assert that the adoption of new technologies facilitates innovative learning approaches, such as e-learning and virtual collaboration tools, which can create a more dynamic and engaging educational environment. Similarly, Ogungbo et al. (2024) opined that by embracing these opportunities, business education programmes can not only bridge the skills gap but also foster a new generation of digital entrepreneurs and highly employable graduates. This in return will remedy the issues and challenges faced with the skills acquisition in business education.

Therefore, the primary focus of this paper is to explore the multifaceted aspects of skill acquisition in business education, specifically examining the significant issues, pervasive challenges, and promising opportunities that have emerged in the digital era.

Business Education skills in the Digital age

The advent of the digital era has ushered in an unprecedented transformation across all sectors of the global economy, fundamentally altering the nature of work and the competencies required for professional success (Sokpo & Adegboye, 2020). What were once considered supplementary or niche skills have now become foundational, as businesses increasingly integrate advanced technologies into their core operations. This paradigm shift necessitates a continuous re-evaluation of the essential skillset for business professionals, moving beyond traditional aptitudes to encompass a dynamic array of digital and complementary capabilities.

Historically, business education emphasized core managerial, communication, and analytical skills, preparing individuals for roles within established organizational structures. Manyanga and Ndudzo (2021) noted that while these foundational skills remain relevant, their application has been profoundly reshaped by digital tools and platforms. Today's business environment demands proficiency in areas such as digital literacy, data analytics, cybersecurity awareness, and the adept use of cloud-based collaboration tools. Professionals are expected not only to understand business principles but also to leverage technology for strategic decision-making, market analysis, and efficient operations. For instance, digital marketing expertise, including Search Engine Optimization (SEO), content creation, and social media strategy, has become

indispensable for reaching and engaging customers in an online-first world (Ikenga & Okpuzor, 2025).

Beyond purely technical proficiencies, the digital age also amplifies the importance of adaptive and human-centric "soft skills." As automation handles routine tasks, the demand for critical thinking, complex problem-solving, creativity, adaptability, and effective digital communication become paramount (World Economic Forum, 2016; isEazy, n.d.). Professionals must be able to navigate ambiguity, collaborate effectively across virtual teams, and continuously learn and unlearn in a rapidly evolving technological landscape. This blend of robust digital capabilities and refined interpersonal skills forms the bedrock of competence for the modern business professional, highlighting a significant evolution in the expectations placed upon graduates of business education programmes.

Models and Stages of Skill Acquisition

One of the most widely cited models for skill acquisition is the three-stage model proposed by Fitts and Posner (1967). This model describes the transition from being a complete novice to becoming a skilled performer. The initial stage is the cognitive stage; where the learner is trying to understand the skill. They focus on what to do and how to do it. Learning is primarily a cognitive process involving observation, verbal instruction, and a lot of conscious effort. Performance at this stage is often inconsistent, slow, and prone to many errors (Fitts & Posner, 1967). An example is a beginner learning to drive, who has to consciously think about every single step: "press the clutch, shift the gear, release the clutch slowly.

The second stage is the associative stage. In this stage, the learner has a basic understanding of the skill and begins to refine his/her movements through practice. The focus shifts from what to do to how to do it better. Errors become less frequent, and performance becomes more consistent and efficient. The learner starts to rely more on kinesthetic feedback (the feeling of the movement) rather than external cues (Fitts & Posner, 1967). This phase is often the longest, as it involves fine-tuning and repetition.

The final stage i**s** the autonomous Stage. At this stage, the skill becomes automatic and requires minimal conscious effort. The performer can execute the skill smoothly and efficiently, often without having to think about the individual movements. This frees up cognitive resources, allowing the performer to focus on other aspects, such as strategy or environmental factors (Fitts & Posner, 1967). A skilled organist, for example, can play a complex piece while simultaneously focusing on the emotional expression of the music, not the individual key presses.

This model has great relevance to skill acquisition in business education especially in learning digital tools where the learn has to take it step by step until he/she masters the skill. The performance at the initial stage is often inconsistent and slow but progresses until the learner can execute the skill smoothly and efficiently.

Issues in Business Education Programmes in the Digital era

Curriculum Gaps in Business Education

One of the most prominent issues in business education programme is the misalignment between academic curricula and the evolving demands of the job market. While traditional business education focuses on foundational knowledge in areas like management, stenography, accounting, and finance, the curriculum often fails to adequately integrate modern digital skills (Abubakar, Paris, & Sambo, 2025). This could lead to producing graduates who may have strong theoretical knowledge but lack the practical, hands-on experience with the digital tools and platforms that are essential in today's workplace. According to Otu and Sefotho (2024), the fast-paced nature of technology means that the curricula can become obsolete quickly. The digital era requires a curriculum that integrates modern technology and focuses on 21st-century skills which

include critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy etc. Aigbepue (2011) opined that there is need for Students to be proficient in a wide range of digital tools and technologies, from data analytics and AI to cloud computing and cybersecurity. In the words of Okpan (2006), the digital economy values innovation and problem-solving. So, the curriculum must foster an entrepreneurial mindset and the ability to think creatively to adapt to new business models. Sam and Joe (2000) affirmed that as businesses increasingly rely on online channels, skills in digital marketing are essential. The curriculum should include training in areas like search engine optimization, social media marketing, and content creation. In the same vein, Gabadeen (2015) emphasized that the ability to collect, analyze, and interpret data is crucial and for that reason business education must prepare students to make informed decisions based on data analytics.

Moreover, business education programmes are criticized for being overly theoretical, with a heavy emphasis on lectures and case studies rather than practical application (ResearchGate, n.d.). Digital skills, by their nature, require experiential learning. Students need opportunities to work with real-world data, use industry-standard software, and participate in simulations to truly master these competencies. Nwobu (2023) noted that employers of labour increasingly seek graduates who cannot only use digital tools but also apply critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration skills in a digital context.

Pedagogical Challenges in Business Education

Beyond curriculum design, educators face a range of pedagogical challenges in teaching digital skills effectively. The shift from traditional instruction to a technology-integrated approach requires a fundamental change in teaching methods and a new set of competencies for instructors themselves. Teresita (2022) asserts that the digital era has introduced e-learning and blended learning models, which require educators to adapt their teaching styles. This involves creating engaging online content, facilitating virtual collaboration, and managing a hybrid classroom environment. In the view of Barrot (2020) and Fasinro (2024), many business educators, particularly in developing countries, lack the necessary content and pedagogical knowledge to effectively teach digital skills. This maybe as a result of limited access to professional development opportunities to update their skills and learn new instructional strategies for a digital-first classroom.

Mafugu et al (2022) noted that the successful implementation of digital skills training is contingent on access to adequate technological infrastructure. This includes modern computer laboratories, high-speed internet, and updated software licenses. Lomba-Portela & et al (2022) observed that many institutions, especially in resource-constrained environments, struggle to provide these essential resources, creating a "digital divide" within the education system. Also, Rumanyika and Galan (2015) opined that many institutions in developing nations lack the necessary funding and infrastructure to support a robust digital learning environment. This includes slow internet connections, inadequate hardware and software, and a lack of technical support.

Abubakar et al (2025) observed that while the digital tools are readily available, some educators continue to rely on traditional, teacher-centered methods like lectures and rote memorization. This approach is ill-suited for developing digital competencies, which are best acquired through project-based learning, collaborative assignments, and problem-solving activities. Just as curricula can become outdated, so too can the pedagogical tools used to teach. Educators must continuously learn to use new educational software, learning management systems, and collaborative platforms to keep their teaching methods relevant and engaging for a new generation of learners (Abubakar, Paris, & Sambo, 2025).

Institute of Product Leadership (2025) suggests partnerships with technology companies, real-world case studies, and live industry projects to provide students with practical exposure. This approach will help to bridge the gap between classroom theory and professional practice, a

critical factor for improving graduate employability. Also, in response to the need for flexibility, business schools are increasingly embracing microlearning-delivering, bite-sized, on-demand content, and blended learning models that combine online and in-person instruction. This approach caters to students who need to balance education with professional and personal commitments (eFront LMS, 2024). In leveraging technology, educators can create personalized learning paths that adapt to individual student needs and paces. This can be supported by AI-driven tools that provide customized feedback and resources, ensuring each student develops the competencies they need most (SHIFT eLearning, 2025).

Faculty Development and Training

For business education programmes to succeed in the digital era, faculty must be willing and able to embrace new technologies and teaching methods. Omariba, (2012) affirmed that many educators are comfortable with the business education's status quo and may be resistant to adopting new technologies and methodologies. This can be due to lack of understanding of the benefits of digital transformation or fear of the unknown. In the word of Nwosu & Ogobomo (2012), faculty often lack the proper training and professional development to effectively teach in a digital environment. Continuous training and upskilling are essential to ensure educators are proficient in using new technologies and delivering engaging online instruction. Yusuf (2005) and Omariba, (2012) assert that a significant number of educators lack the fundamental digital skills needed to operate computers and use software applications. This skill gap directly impacts their ability to teach students the necessary competencies for the digital workplace.

Leveraging Digital Technologies and Their Opportunities for Enhanced Learning and Employability

In this 21st century, digital technologies, once considered a mere supplement to traditional methods, are now central to fostering enhanced learning experiences and developing a workforce equipped for the demands of the modern economy. By providing unprecedented access, fostering new pedagogical approaches, and bridging the gap between academia and industry, these tools create significant opportunities for individuals and societies alike. One of the most profound impacts of digital technology on education is the democratization of knowledge. According to ResearchGate (2023), e-learning platforms and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs**)** have broken down geographical and socio-economic barriers, offering high-quality education to a global audience. Learners, regardless of their location, can access digital libraries, scholarly articles, and multimedia resources, enabling them to pursue education at their own pace and on their own schedule (Drexel University, n.d.). This flexibility is particularly beneficial for working professionals and individuals with other commitments, allowing them to engage in continuous learning and skill development without the constraints of a traditional classroom (Warwick Business School, 2024).

Beyond accessibility, digital tools enable a highly personalized learning experience. According to Smith as cited in ResearchGate (2023) adaptive learning platforms use data to tailor content to an individual student's needs, providing immediate feedback and adjusting the curriculum based on their progress. This approach not only increases student engagement and motivation but also promotes a deeper understanding of concepts. In the view of Explorance (2025), technologies like virtual simulations and online collaboration spaces connect classroom learning to real-world applications, helping students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills essential for future careers.

Moreover, the skills gained through digital learning are directly translatable to the modern workplace, where digital literacy is no longer a niche skill but a fundamental requirement. A report from the National Skills Coalition (2023) found that a significant majority of jobs in the United States require some form of digital skills, ranging from basic proficiency with office software to advanced data analysis and programming. MITSkills (2025) emphasized the ability to navigate digital communication tools, manage data, and stay current with evolving technology is crucial for

success in virtually every field. Digital education platforms play a pivotal role in preparing individuals for this reality by offering specialized courses and certifications that directly address the skills gap. By collaborating with industry leaders, these platforms ensure that their curricula are relevant and aligned with market demands (World Bank, 2023). Also, the acquisition of these market-relevant digital skills and certifications is highly valued by employers and has been shown to significantly increase employment rates and earning potential for trainees. According to University of Phoenix (2024) the online learning fosters the development of vital soft skills, such as time management, self-discipline, and collaborative communication in a virtual environment, which are all highly sought after by employers.

Conclusion

The digital era presents a double-edged sword for business education. It has created a critical skills gap, but it has also opened up a wealth of opportunities for transformation. The issues of outdated curricula, inadequate funding, and lack of digital literacy among educators are critical, but they are not insurmountable. By embracing curriculum modernization, blended learning, and continuous professional development, business education programmes can effectively prepare students for the demands of the 21st-century workforce. Ultimately, the future of business education undoubtedly, depends on its ability to evolve from a traditional discipline into a dynamic, technologically-driven field that equips students with the skills they need to be both employable and entrepreneurial in a constantly changing world.

Suggestions

The paper suggests that:

1. curricula should be regularly reviewed and updated in collaboration with industry experts to ensure alignment with current and future workforce needs.
2. business educators should embrace learner-centered, experiential learning as their teaching methods.
3. institutions should provide ongoing professional development and training opportunities for educators to enhance their digital competencies and pedagogical skills. This could include workshops, certifications, and collaborations with industry professionals.
4. there should be strong partnership between business education programme and industries. This could lead to the co-creation of curricula, mentorship programmes, guest lectures by industry experts, and opportunities for student internships that provide valuable real-world experience.

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