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Digital Skills Required for Business Education Graduates: Employer Perceptions in Delta State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This research examined the specific digital skills necessary to boost the employability of Business Education graduates in Delta State. A survey involved 164 randomly selected participants, comprising employers from the public and private sectors across the nine Local Government Areas in the North Senatorial District of Delta State. The survey utilised a four-point rating scale, ranging from "Very Highly Required" (VHR) to "Seldom Required" (SE). The data were analysed using mean and standard deviation methodologies to address the research questions. Furthermore, a t-test was employed to evaluate the hypotheses. Data were collected through validated questionnaires, demonstrating a reliability coefficient of 0.81, confirming the study's validity and dependability. The results show a significant demand for specific digital skills from employers, such as data analysis, digital marketing, and project management, highlighting the practical implications of the research. These findings are significant for the Business Education sector in Nigeria as they provide a clear roadmap for curriculum changes that can enhance the employability of graduates. The study concludes that Business Education graduates must develop new skills, competencies, and knowledge in digital technology to enhance their competitiveness in the job market. The recommendations emphasise the importance of training for business education undergraduates, enabling the students to apply theoretical concepts to practical situations.

Keywords: Business Education, Employability, Labour Market, Undergraduate, Digital Skills, Nigeria.

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, Nigeria is facing a significant unemployment crisis. According to the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (2024), the unemployment rate rose to 5.3% in the first quarter of 2024, marking a continued increase for the third consecutive quarter since the second quarter (Q2) of 2023. The rise in unemployment has been more pronounced in urban areas than rural regions, further aggravating inflation and reducing purchasing power, which soared from 30.5% in Q3 of 2023 to 36.9% in Q1 of 2024. This economic turmoil has profoundly affected Nigerian youths with post-secondary education, many of whom find themselves unemployed, underemployed, or disengaged from socioeconomic activities. The National Bureau of Statistics (2023) has noted that the unemployment rate among graduates (persons with post-secondary education) has persistently exceeded the national average of 8% in the second quarter of 2023, making it

the highest among all educational groups, apart from those with less than elementary education (NEET) which is 13%. Alarudeen (2019) highlighted that despite many empowerment initiatives and an increasing number of tertiary institutions to cultivate a skilled labour force, job postings for graduate roles remain abundant across various sectors in Nigeria.

The shortage of qualified, tech-savvy workers in specific roles is frequently ascribed to universities and other higher education institutions not providing students with essential employability skills that correspond with labour market demands. This challenge arises from an insufficient emphasis on entrepreneurship and digital skills within the Nigerian educational system. According to Akpan et al. (2023), 82% of job openings require digital skills. Integrating digital skills into the educational curriculum is not just essential, but it also holds the potential to transform graduates' job prospects. These skills are increasingly vital across all job sectors. This integration is particularly crucial in addressing the high unemployment rates among graduates, especially in Business Education. By incorporating these skills, business education graduates can acquire a comprehensive skill set that enhances their competitiveness in the job market (Nguyen & Sit, 2024). This research aims to address this issue by identifying the specific digital skills that can enhance the employability of Business Education graduates.

Many researchers, including Ezoem et al. (2024) and Ikenga et al. (2022), argue that the goal of business education is to nurture graduates and provide them with a range of skills that enable them to make substantial contributions to the workforce. This is because business education emphasises the development of competencies that improve employability and foster job creation. Ikenga and Egbule (2023) also viewed Business Education as a training method that equips individuals with essential skills and knowledge to become effective managers or educators within the business realm. By enhancing digital competencies, graduates of Business Education can boost their employability, enabling them to find jobs and thrive in a competitive, technology-oriented job market; additionally, Business education imparts crucial knowledge and abilities for public and private roles, aiding career progression.

Statement of the Problem

The employability of Business Education graduates today is increasingly dependent on their digital skills, particularly in the context of the rapidly evolving digital economy. Employers in Delta State, among others, have varied expectations concerning the digital competencies of business education graduates. The impact of technology on businesses is unmistakable; it has removed geographical barriers and facilitated expansion into a global market, as business owners are empowered to make well-informed decisions and encourage continuous innovation. This leads to developing new products and fosters an international community where information is readily accessible.

Despite the significant influence of rapidly evolving digital applications in businesses, Jeffries (2021) has highlighted concerns regarding insufficient graduates with diverse digital skills for navigating complex databases, web design, video content production, and webpage creation. In Nigeria, the business education programme primarily emphasises theoretical knowledge and rhetoric, leaving graduates often lacking the practical skills and competencies required for effective performance in professional and business environments; moreover, numerous undergraduates studying business encounter significant obstacles stemming from restricted access to information and communication technology (ICT) (Azubuike, 2023; Ikenga & Egbule, 2023). The increasing automation in the job market exacerbates this issue. Lecturers and other stakeholders have expressed concerns about the inadequate ICT facilities, which severely impact the quality of education. Consequently, frequent strikes in Nigerian universities disrupt the preparation of business education graduates, ultimately affecting their ability to meet the demands of the modern workforce (Azubuike & Oguguo, 2024). Conversely, Southern Asia is witnessing a steady increase in the adoption of digital tools for undergraduate business education at Southeast Asian universities. A significant portion of students in countries such as Singapore (96%), Thailand (77%), and Indonesia (59%) can access online learning platforms. This growth stems from the increasing availability of technology-driven solutions that enhance access to educational resources, which is crucial for fostering digital innovation and establishing business and digital startups after graduation (UNESCO and SEAMEO, 2023).

The increasing global demand for graduates to possess essential digital skills is urgent for employers aiming to recover from the post-pandemic period. As companies adapt to the rapidly changing digital landscape, they require a workforce proficient in utilising new technologies and tools. This pressing requirement and other factors have led to a notable research gap concerning effective strategies to address this skills shortfall and prepare upcoming graduates for future challenges (Das et al., 2020; Hajek et al., 2022).

Research Objective

This study investigates the key digital skills employers consider vital for business education graduates, aiming to boost their employability in a competitive job market. It emphasises competencies like data analytics, digital marketing, and technological proficiency while examining future workforce trends. Furthermore, the research discusses how educational institutions can narrow the gap between academic offerings and industry requirements. These institutions can significantly enhance their graduates' job prospects by adapting curricula to address businesses' changing needs. The results present an encouraging outlook for business education, indicating that graduates with relevant digital skills will be better equipped to meet modern employers' expectations and succeed in their careers.

Research Questions

The research study has formulated the following research questions to provide direction for the investigation:

1. What social media skills are requisite for Business Education graduates to enhance their employability?
2. What digital business analysis skills are necessary for Business Education graduates to improve their employability?

The following null hypotheses guided the study:

1. There is no significant difference between the mean responses of public and private employers regarding the labour on social media skills required for business education.
2. Public and private employers do not differ significantly in their responses to the digital business analysis skills required of business education graduates.

Method

A survey was conducted to gather insights from employers in Delta State's public and private sectors regarding the essential social media and digital business analysis skills that business education graduates need to enhance their employability. The study included participants from Delta State, specifically 164 individuals from the Delta North senatorial district, which comprises nine local government areas: Oshimili South, Oshimili North, Aniocha North, Aniocha South, Ika North East, Ika South, Ndokwa East, Ndokwa West, and Ukwuani. Participants from private and public enterprises were selected using cluster and random sampling methods. A four-point rating scale ranged from Very Highly Required (VHR) to Seldomly Required (SE). Structured questionnaires were validated by 4 Chief Lecturers in Business Education at the Federal College of Education (Technical) in Asaba and were administered and collected after a week. The data were analysed using mean and standard deviation to address the research questions, and a t-test was conducted to evaluate the hypotheses at a significance level of 0.05. Responses with scores of 2.50 and above were deemed acceptable, while those scoring below 2.50 were not considered acceptable.

Results

Research Question 1

What social media skills are requisite for Business Education graduates to enhance their employability?

Table 1: Mean and Standard deviation on the perceived social media skills required by business education graduates to make them employable

S/No	Required social media skills for Business Education graduates	X	SD	Decisions
1.	Ability to communicate effectively	2.94	0.53	HR
2.	Ability to come up with new ideas, creative initiatives, and campaigns.	3.34	-.61	HR
3.	Ability to write well when creating a post or crafting a tweet.	3.15	0.72	HR
4.	Ability to create content duration	2.11	0.57	SR
5.	Ability to use social media to project movements.	2.19	0.70	SR
6.	Aptitude to learn new features on social media platforms	2.92	0.75	HR
7.	Ability to market products on social media.	2.31	0.73	SR
8.	Ability to adapt to changes in social media.	3.21	0.78	HR
9.	Ability to think strategically in social media.	2.56	0.95	HR
10.	Ability to build good relationships in social media.	2.58	0.65	HR
	Grand Mean	**2.58**	**0.65**	**HR**

Source: Authors

Table 1 highlights the key digital social media skills that business education graduates need to develop to boost their employability in a competitive job market. The average proficiency score for these skills is 2.58, with a standard deviation of 0.65, suggesting a moderate variation in the graduates' skill sets. Importantly, every skill listed was recognised as essential, showing a shared agreement on the significance of these competencies. This data emphasises the crucial role of digital literacy and social media expertise in equipping graduates to meet the challenges of contemporary business landscapes.

Research Question 2

What digital business analysis skills are necessary for Business Education graduates to improve their employability?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation on the perceived business analysis skills required of business education graduates to make them more employable.

S/No	Required business analysis skills for Business Education graduates	X	SD	Decisions
11.	Understanding business imperatives.	3.28	0.81	HR
12.	Ability to understand customers.	2.17	0.91	SR
13.	Ability to understand business processes.	2.55	0.86	HR
14.	Collaborative business skills.	2.50	0.81	HR
15.	Team building	2.50	0.81	HR
16.	Effective use of data	2.34	0.66	SR
17.	Getting acquainted with new technologies	3.15	0.72	HR
18.	Ability to organise and coordinate well.	2.16	0.81	SR
19.	Ability to develop new ideas (Research)	2.11	0.93	SR
20.	Ability to listen to others.	2.07	1.0	SR
	Grand Mean	**2.31**	**0.87**	**SR**

Source: Authors.

Table 2 presents data that sheds light on the employability of business education graduates, particularly regarding their need for business analysis skills. The results show that these graduates seldom utilise business analysis competencies to enhance their job prospects, reflected in a grand mean score of 2.31 and a standard deviation of 0.87, indicating a generally low perception of the importance of these skills. This result suggests a possible gap between the skills learned during their education and those valued in the job market. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that no items were considered unacceptable or rejected during the analysis, highlighting a general agreement among respondents about the limited significance of business analysis skills in improving employability within their sector. This points to an opportunity for curriculum development to synchronise educational outcomes with employer needs better.

Test of Hypothesis

There is no significant difference between the mean responses of public and private employers regarding the labour on social media skills required for business education.

Table 3

Type of employers	N	X	SD	Df	t-calculated value	t-critical value	Decision
Public	96	2.60	0.61	162	0.40	1.96	Not Significant
Private	68	2.56	0.69				

Source: Authors.

The analysis presented in Table 3 indicates that the t-calculated value is 0.40, while the t-critical value is 1.96 at a 0.5 significance level. The null hypothesis is consequently upheld because the t-calculated value is less than the t-critical value.

Hypothesis 2

Public and private employers do not differ significantly in their responses to the digital business analysis skills required of business education graduates.

Table 4

Type	No.	X	SD	Df	t-calculated value	t-critical value	Decision
Public	96	3.59	0.62		0.35	0.79	Accepted
Private	68	3.55	0.58				

Source: Authors.

The computed t-value of 0.35 is less than the critical t-value of 0.79 at a significance level of 0.05, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis.

Discussion of Findings

This study's findings indicate that Business Education graduates in Delta State, Nigeria, can enhance their employment prospects by acquiring digital marketing skills. Key competencies include effective communication, creative idea generation, proficient writing for content creation, a willingness to learn about new features, product marketing, and strategic thinking. This supports Olaniyi's (2022) assertion that digital skills, particularly in social media, transform the modern workplace by enabling tasks such as identifying opportunities and managing business risks. Positions that primarily involve repetitive tasks are at risk of automation without the integration of digital skills, including social media proficiency. Farrugia (2024) emphasised that graduates with data analytics skills will have a competitive advantage in data analysis and processing careers. Essential skills include social media proficiency as a fundamental digital capability, data analytics for informed decision-

making, engaging video content to attract audiences, leveraging artificial intelligence to streamline processes, and implementing mobile marketing for high-quality content delivery. Furthermore, students who develop digital skills will significantly improve their employability and ensure their relevance in future careers by mastering essential digital platforms and utilising advanced AI tools (Anugerah, 2024).

Murire et al. (2023) highlight the important influence of social media on graduates' skill development and perceived employability. The study reveals that social media is an essential resource for circulating information about internships and job openings for recent graduates, facilitating interactions between employers and job seekers. Additionally, these findings align with the research by Busuyi et al. (2021) and Ikenga and Egbule (2024), indicating that graduates who actively participate in social media can improve their planning, teamwork, and independent work skills. Such engagement likely leads to developing professional networks, timely feedback, and enhanced communication skills. In addition, engaging in these activities can foster vital soft skills highly sought after by employers in the evolving landscape of the 21st century, significantly enhancing one's employability and adaptability. (Ikenga & van der Sijde, 2024). These insights are pertinent to the first research question, which aims to identify the essential social media skills that Business Education graduates should develop to improve their employability.

The research underscores the importance of specific business analysis skills for graduates with a business background. These skills encompass a comprehensive understanding of business priorities, knowledge of business operations, and strong teamwork capabilities. Additionally, crucial skills include active listening, effective organisation and coordination, and an appreciation for customer experience. These insights align with a report from the Digital Marketing Institute (2021), which identifies educational institutions' challenges in updating curricula to meet the growing demand for digital skills and adequately prepare students with the necessary competencies. In response to this transition towards a digital curriculum. The Institute of Art, Design + Technology Digital (2024) indicates that educational programs in areas such as digital business and data analytics significantly impact Business education graduates, equipping them with essential capabilities needed for various roles in business.

These programs emphasise digital competencies like cloud computing, business transformation, and data analytics, nurturing critical thinking and improving the ability to address real-world business problems. There is also a pressing need for graduates to be skilled in coding and blockchain and can elevate businesses through knowledge in search engine optimisation and creative brand growth on social media. Mastering digital skills is crucial for increasing productivity and driving economic expansion. Nonetheless, achieving this requires inspiring students with employment prospects and encouraging them to develop the skills employers demand (Jeffries, 2021). These insights are directly linked to the second research question, which explores the digital business analysis skills vital for boosting Business Education graduates' employability.

Conclusion

Business education has transformed remarkably from traditional classroom environments with typewriters and chalkboards to modern, technology-driven learning spaces. This evolution highlights the essential role of business education in fostering technological progress for sustainable economic development. Furthermore, businesses worldwide increasingly adopt digitalisation and artificial intelligence (AI) to enhance operations, fulfil consumer needs, and seize a larger market share. Given their inherent flexibility, educational institutions are ideally positioned to incorporate new digital skills into their curricula. As business education continues to align with technological advancements, it plays a critical role in preparing students with the competencies required for future success. Graduates of business programs are expected to possess vital skills as employers seek to elevate employee performance and justify their investment in compensation.

The findings suggest that business education graduates are typically not equipped with the recent curriculum and the essential lifelong skills crucial for navigating today's digital landscape. They often struggle to effectively utilise digital tools for communication, which impedes their ability to generate innovative entrepreneurial ideas and create engaging content. Additionally, they face challenges in marketing products effectively, and their strategic thinking on social media platforms tends to be underdeveloped. This skills gap limits their potential to succeed in a fast-paced and continuously evolving business environment. Many authors, such as Anoke (2024) and Ikenga and Egbule (2024), Azubuike & Oguguo (2024). Pointed out institutional barriers hindering progress in Nigeria's education system. These barriers stem from insufficient technological and ICT resources, a lack of trained expertise for undergraduates, unreliable computers, limited high-speed internet access, inadequate funding, and a scarcity of modern hardware and software. Additionally, there is an urgent need for ongoing technical support and improvement of most dysfunctional existing ICT systems in various educational institutions.

Recommendations

This study puts forth several important recommendations:

1. Emphasis on Practical Experience: Undergraduates in business education should prioritise acquiring hands-on experience within real-world environments. This can include internships, cooperative programs, or project-based learning, which enable students to apply theoretical concepts to practical situations, effectively bridging the divide between academic knowledge and workplace demands.
2. Awareness of Workplace Realities: Students pursuing undergraduate business education must remain informed about the workplace's ever-evolving dynamics. This entails understanding industry trends, organisational culture, and the skills that are highly sought after by employers, thus preparing them for the complexities of their future careers.
3. Customizing Skills for Employability: Business education undergraduates should be encouraged to tailor their skill sets to align with their career aspirations and job

market requirements. This may involve pursuing additional training in specialised areas, engaging in relevant extracurricular activities, or committing to self-directed learning to enhance their employability.

4. Continuous Learning After Graduation: Students are encouraged to attend seminars and workshops focusing on contemporary developments in business practices. Participating in lifelong learning opportunities will keep their knowledge current and reinforce their dedication to professional growth in an ever-changing business landscape.

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