

Digital Competences Required By Business Education Graduates in Imo State for Optimal Performance in the Digital Office Era

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Abstract:

The study focused on digital office skills required by business education graduates in Imo State for effective performance in modern office. Two research questions guided the study. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised of 65 business educators from the three tertiary institutions in Imo State that offer business education courses. There was no sampling because of the management size of the population. A structured questionnaire titled digital office skills required by business education graduates for modern office (DOSRBEGMO) was used to collect data for the study. The instrument was validated by two experts from business education department, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Owerri. The instrument was tested for internal consistency using Cronbach Alpha that yielded reliability coefficient of 0.76. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while t-test was used to test the research hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The result of the study revealed that digital competencies are highly required. For optimal performance in digital office era. Digital hard competences of use of computer, internet, other office equipment's and communication skills among others, and digital soft competencies of team work, time management, problem solving are important. The result of hypotheses revealed there is no significant different in mean scores of male and female business educators. From the findings, the study recommends among others that modern equipment's should be provided at every business education department by the tertiary institutions.

Keywords: *Digital Competencies, Business Education Digital Office.*

Introduction

In today's fast paced technology driven world, establishments are increasingly relying on digital tools and processes to enhance productivity and efficiency. Several formal offices has witnessed drastic changes as office activities are now performed making use of new technologies. Izuchukwu (2022) noted that the activities of the present office has moved from analog to digital.

A digital office according to Johnson (2019) refers to a workplace that relies heavily on technological and digital tools to manage and complete tasks. Onuh and Ndu (2019) noted that the nature of the 21st century digital office includes proficiency in word processing spreadsheet analysis, presentation software, database management and project management tools. In the view of Abuh (2019) the sophisticated nature of the present day office has moved the maturity of jobs of the clerical officers, secretaries, managers, accountants, public relation officers among others from the conventional analog method to digital method making use of new technologies. The use of new technologies in the present office by employees of establishments demands competence. Competency according to Akarahu and Ile (2014) refers to a standardized requirement for an individual to properly perform a specific job. It is a set of knowledge skills and attitude a person need to perform specific task. It is the capacity for performing a task accurately.

Okoro (2021) opined that effective performance of task in the 21st century office requires digital competence, knowledge, abilities, and skills. Digital competencies involves skills and capabilities for handling and manipulating digital technologies for optimal performance and effectiveness in the office.

According to Udo (2021), digital competencies are the abilities and skills required to effectively utilize the digital tools and platforms commonly used in a digital office environment, Ugorji (2019), stated that digital competencies encompasses a range of abilities to use digital devices, communication applications and networks to access and manage information to create and collaborate to solve problems as it exists in the present digital office.

Abiam (2022) identified two basic categories of digital competencies required for effective office activity to include; digital office hard competencies and digital office skill competencies.

Digital office hard competencies refer to specific technical skills related to the use of digital tools and technologies in an office environment. Office hard competencies according to Oje (2019) includes proficiency in making use of Microsoft office, google, workspace, Adobe applications, knowledge of data management tools, communication, platforms, email, instant messaging and video conferencing, desktop publishing among others. Ofor (2020) noted digital office competence is more than just the ability to use the computer, but ability to also use other office and business technologies that are useful in handling office activities such as the internet facilities. On the other hand, digital soft competencies refer to interpersonal and intrapersonal skills such as communication, teamwork, problem-solving and time management. According to Ibe (2021), office soft competencies are essential for effective collaboration and productivity in an office environment.

According to Ubochi (2021) digital competencies should be integrated into every curriculum to inculcate into individuals the needed abilities to function effectively in the present office era. According to Uzoagulu, (2018) digital competencies should form the integral part of vocational studies including business education. Business education program is an integral part of vocational education that equips its recipients with the necessary skills, competencies attitude, knowledge, necessary for successful career in the office and in the business world. Eze (2018) defined business education as education for teaching, business, office and entrepreneurial skills. Etonyeaku (2009), opined that business education has a formidable force which would equips its graduates with appropriate skills, knowledge, abilities and competencies that will enable them perform effectively in the modern office. Uwazie (2021) affirms that business education program has become one of the

required vocational studies that prepares individual to acquire competent skills in handling the technologies available in the 21st century office, the author further noted that the business education programme equips its recipients with the various technological competencies to effectively handle secretarial, accounting and management, roles in the world of work.

Statement of the Problem

There are many digital technologies that are being introduced in the present 21st century office. This is as a result of rapid improvement in the technology and the rising demand for digital competency in the labour market.

Uwakwe (2020) stated that despite the increasing importance of digital competencies in the modern workplace, business education graduates may not possess the necessary skills to effectively navigate and utilize digital tools in the digital office era. This presents a problem for both the graduates and the organizations that employ them, as a lack of digital competencies can lead to decreased productivity, communication breakdowns, and missed opportunities for innovation and growth. Therefore, there is a need to identify and address the specific digital competencies required by business education graduates to achieve optimal performance in the digital office era.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the digital hard competencies required by business education graduates for optimal performance in the digital office era?
2. what are the digital soft competencies required by business education graduates for optimal performance in the digital office era?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female business educators on the digital hard competencies required by business education graduates for optimal performance in digital office era.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female business educators on the digital soft competencies required by business education graduates for optimal performance in the digital office era.

Methodology

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population of the study comprised of 65 business educators from three tertiary institutions in Imo State that offer business education program (Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education, Federal Polytechnic Nekede and Imo State Polytechnic Umuma). The entire population was studied due to the management size as such the study did not adopt any sample/sampling technique. The data for the study was collected using structured questionnaire titled digital competencies required for optimal performance in digital office era (DCROPDOE). The instrument was of two sections, A and B. Section A sought to elicit personal information of the respondents while section B. Covered data collection on the research questions. The response options of highly required (HR) = 4 moderately required (MR) = 3 less required = 2, and not required NR = 1 was used. The questionnaire was validated by two experts from the department of business education, Alvan Ikoku Federal University of Education Owerri. All the suggestions of the experts were duly considered to improve the final draft of the questions. Cronbach Alpha reliability method was used to test the internal consistency of the instrument and a reliability coefficient of 0.76 was obtained. The researchers with the help of two research assistants distributed and collected the data from the respondents. Mean and standard deviation were used to

answer the research questions while t-test statistics was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The criterion mean of 2.50 was used to adjust the position of the respondents, any item with mean value of 2.50 and above was interpreted as “required” while any mean less than 2.50 were interpreted as “not required”. The hypotheses of no significant difference was accepted when the t-calculated (t-cal) value was less than the t-critical (t-tab) value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance, while hypotheses of no significant difference was rejected when the t-calculated (t-cal) value was greater than the t-critical (t-tab) value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1

What are the digital hard competencies required by business education graduates in Imo State for optimal performance in the digital office era?

Table 1: Respondents mean ratings on the digital hard competencies required by business educational graduates for optimal performance.

S/N	DIGITAL HARD COMPETENCIES	$\bar{X}$	SD	DECISION
1	Ability to use MS-office skills.	2.61	1.37	Required
2	Ability to use google drive skills.	3.10	0.74	Required
3	Ability to send information using email.	3.06	1.27	Required
4	Ability to use social media.	2.72	0.65	Required
5	Web page design skills.	3.16	0.75	Required
6	Computer graphic skills.	3.08	1.25	Required
7	Internet skills.	2.59	0.68	Required
8	Video conferencing skills.	3.12	1.27	Required
9	Computer spreadsheet skills.	2.54	1.04	Required
10	Instant message skills.	3.11	1.28	Required
11	Data management skills.	2.72	1.81	Required
12	Google workspace skill.	3.23	1.09	Required
13	Adope application skill.	2.85	1.65	Required
	Grand Mean	3.19	1.09	

From table 1, items 1-13 have their means rated between 2.54 and 3.23, all of which are greater than 2.50. This shows that all the respondents agree with the items as digital hard competencies required by business education graduates for optimal performance in the digital era.

Research Question 2

What are the digital soft competencies required by business education graduates for optimal performance in the digital era?

Table 2: Respondents mean ratings on the digital soft competencies required by business education graduates for optimal performance in the digital office era.

S/N	DIGITAL SOFT COMPETENCIES	$\bar{X}$	SD	DECISION
14	Team work competencies.	3.20	0.31	Required
15	Problem-solving competencies.	3.11	0.42	Required
16	Time management competencies.	2.55	1.83	Required
17	e-communication competencies.	2.68	0.43	Required
18	Listening competencies.	2.83	1.08	Required
19	Critical thinking competencies.	3.01	0.12	Required
20	Cordial relationship competencies.	3.86	0.19	Required
21	Adaptation competencies.	2.70	1.21	Required

22	Decision making competencies.	3.09	0.62	Required
23	Data visualization competencies.	2.52	1.07	Required
	Grand Mean	3.12	0.29	

From table 2: items 14-23 have their means rated between 2.52 to 3.86. This revealed that the entire items on digital soft competencies are required for optimal performance in the digital office era.

Test of Hypothesis

Hypotheses 1: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female business educators on the digital hard competencies required of business education graduates for optimal performance in the digital era.

Table 3: The t-test result of the mean responses of male and female business educators on the digital hard competencies required by business education graduates for optimal performance in the digital era.

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	DF	t-cal	t-crit	Level of significant	Decision
Male	27	2.21	0.19	118	0.32	1.96	0.05	Not significant
Female	38	3.57	0.23					

The result in table 3 shows that the t-calculated (t-cal) value of 0.32 is less than the t-critical (t-tab) value of 1.96 at 118 degree of freedom. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of business educators on the digital hard competencies required by business education students for optimal performance in the digital office era.

Hypotheses 2: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female business educators on the digital soft competencies required by business education graduates for optimal performance in the digital office era.

Table 4: The t-test result of the mean responses of male and female business educators on the digital soft competencies required by business education graduates for optimal performance in the digital office era.

Variable	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	DF	t-cal	t-crit	Level of significant	Decision
Male	27	3.02	1.08	1.13	0.33	1.96	0.05	Not significant
Female	38	2.88	0.87					

The result of the t-test statistics in table 4 showed that the t-calculated (t-cal) value of 0.33 is less than the t-critical (t-tab) value of 1.96 at 118 degree of freedom. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female business educators on the digital soft competencies required of business education graduates for optimal performance in the digital era.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from research question one revealed that the respondents considered all the items in table 1 as digital hard competencies required by business education graduates for optimal performance in today's digital office era. The identified hard competencies including proficiency in office software (MS office) data management tools, google drive, social media, web page design internet skills, video conferencing skills, instant message skills, are essential for effective performance and career success in modern workplace. This finding is in line with the findings of Odunze and Madu (2022) who asserted that the business education graduates in Imo State need competencies in the area of the use of internet and modern office equipments to be relevant in modern office. Also the study found out from research question 2 that digital soft competencies of decision making,

relational skill, time management, e-communication, problem-solving competencies among others are important for optimal performance in the digital office era by business education graduates in Imo State. This finding collaborates with the findings of Akarahu and Ile (2014) who opined that there is need for business education teachers to improve on the use of the new technologies in teaching so as to produce graduates who have the required competencies in the use of e-communication tools and other soft skills required for credible performance in the modern workspace.

Onabu (2019), also noted in his findings that problem solving skill, creative thinking, team work and time management skills are important for relevance in the today's digital office. The result from the respondents on hypothesis in table 3 revealed that male and female business educators do not differ significantly in their mean ratings on the digital hard competencies required by business education graduates for optimal performance in the digital office era. This is in line with Ibeziem and Omaka (2020) findings that irrespective of gender hard digital competencies that involves the use of technical skills and competencies in the modern office is highly needed in the instructional delivery of business education program so as to inculcate its recipients the relevant skills required to function in the present digital office. The result from hypotheses in table 4 revealed that business educators in Imo State do not differ significantly in the soft digital competencies required by business education graduates for optimal performance in the digital office era. This is in line with Adigun (2021) who emphasized that if business education graduates are equipped with the necessary soft digital skills, there is a possibility that they will perform effectively in the various modern offices because they have been equipped with the skills to relate with the machines and individuals (customers, colleague) in the workplace.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that the digital office of the 21st century demands that business education graduates should acquire new competencies including proficiency in office software office, digital communication skills, data management tools, relationship competency, critical thinking competency, team work competency. This indicates the need for business education program to make available the necessary educational facilities to train and produce graduates who will perform efficiently and effectively in the present digital office.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made;

1. Business education curriculum planners should incorporate training in digital competencies as integral part of their curricular.
2. Business educators should be engaged on digital training and retraining to gain digital office competencies.
3. Business educators should endeavours to utilize digital identified competencies in instructional delivery so as to produce graduates who will perform optimally in the 21st century office era.

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