



Digital Skills Gap and Business Education Graduates' Employment Opportunities in Rivers State.

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between gap on digital skills and employment opportunities of Business Education graduates in Rivers State. The research adopted correlation research design. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study comprised one hundred and twenty two (122) Business Education graduates derived from the yellow paper, working in Rivers State. The entire population was studied due to its manageable size. Two sets of structured questionnaires titled “Digital Skills Gap of Business Education Graduates Questionnaire (DSGBEQ)” and “Employment Opportunities of Business Education Graduates Questionnaire (EOBEGQ)” were developed on a 4-point rating scale of Strongly agreed =4point, Agreed =3point, Disagreed =2point and Strongly disagreed =1point, by the researchers. The instrument was validated by two experts from Business Education Department and one in Measurement and Evaluation all in Rivers State University, Port Harcourt. Cronbach Alpha was used to determine the reliability of the instrument which yielded reliability coefficient of 0.78. One hundred and twenty two (122) copies of the instrument were administered to the respondents personally by the researchers and two research assistants, and duly retrieved after completion. The data generated from the instrument were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation to answer the research questions and also to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study revealed a positive and significant relationship between skills gap in digital foundation, digital management and digital marketing and employment opportunities of Business Education graduates in Rivers State. Conclusion drawn from the study was that digital skills are important in ensuring the employment opportunities of Business Education graduates in Rivers State. Based on the findings, the researchers recommended that, higher institutions management should create an enabling environment for students' acquisition of digital skills as a means of curbing unemployment of Business Education graduates in Rivers State.

Keywords: Business Education, Digital skills, Employment Opportunities, Graduates.

Introduction

Globally, employment is no longer a form of security because of the ever changing nature of the economy, the workplace and the needs of the labour market. The labour market is witnessing

a constant growing pressures from talent and skill shortages. Policy makers need to ensure effective workforce development that incorporates skills to increase access to quality jobs and to improve productivity and global competitiveness. The need for digital skills enhancement to enable graduates to remain in the workforce of digital jobs that is in demand, is witnessing a steep rise. Employers as well as experts are worried about the global skills mismatch between graduates and the digital environment. Report from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020) revealed that about 50 million youths across Nigerian are seeking for employment opportunity, of which 25 million are graduates of various tertiary institutions. Employment opportunities for Business Education graduates in this digital era now depend on the level of their acquisition of digital skills that will enable them fit into the global market opportunities of the 21st century and beyond.

The level of digital skills possessed by Business Education graduates is worrisome. There are high digital skills gap among graduates of tertiary institution in Nigeria (Koko & Ajinwo, 2022; Nwafor, 2021). The World Bank report showed that about 2-4% of tertiary education graduates are employable while 18-20% of graduate will require training invention for about 1-4 years to become employable (Nwafor, 2021). Furthermore, studies revealed that, job opportunities exist in Nigeria, but graduates lack the requisite skills to harness these jobs (Koko & Ajinwo, 2022; Sunday, 2021). This implies that labour markets are now recognizing the importance of digital skills for graduates to fit into present day offices. As technology according to Koko and Jiji (2022), makes work much easier and less time consuming, lots of organizations' work can now be done via digital technologies. Thus, consumers now expect more from an organization, it is more important than ever for Business Education graduates of any tertiary institutions to possess range of digital skills which will enhance their employment opportunities.

Accordingly, Koko and Ajinwo (2022) posits that, the kind of employability skills required of graduates of Business Education today have change over time as a result of technologies as well as employers demand for global competitiveness. While Berger and Frey in Akudolu and Onyeneke (2022) asserted that, as new technologies emerge, slim technical skills become inadequate for several emerging jobs while the request for higher level digital skills intensifies. Digital skills according to Norris (2019), are the skills needed for digital devices, communication presentations, and networks to access and manage information from basic online searching and emailing to specialized programming and development. Oboreh and Nnebe (2019) contend that, digital skills include the knowledge and ability to determine information needs from digital technology sources, and to appropriately use digital tools and

facilities to input, access, organize, integrate and assess digital resources as well as to construct new knowledge, create media expressions and communication. Digital skills can be regarded as a critical and well-secure application of digital information for work, at home and for communication and leisure. They encompass a set of skills, knowledge, attitudes and strategies required for using digital media and information and communication. As a result, Business Education graduate's employment opportunities presently and in the future calls for substantial investments in acquisition of digital skills.

Business Education as a programme of study is saddled with the responsibility to teach individual recipients the fundamental concepts, practices and ethos of business. Thus, Business Education helps individuals to acquire saleable digital skills that will enable them fit into various digital business organization or be self-employed in the absence of paid employment. Business Education as a discipline is expected to expose its recipient with the acquisition of diverse skills, hence, it is a programme of study that inculcate in its recipient all the relevant knowledge, skills, attitude, rectitude and value that is required in the business world. A well-structured Business Education programme, if properly implemented with efficiently delivered infrastructure can help bridge the skills gap existing between graduates and the requirements of the corporate business organizations.

There exist countless employment opportunities for Business Education graduates in a digital economy. Employment opportunities exist in the areas of creative design, digital applications, social media marketing, data analytics, e-commerce, network and information security, digital marketing and digital business analysis among others. Hence, the need for graduates to acquire special skills on the aforementioned areas as well as in programming and coding, cloud computing skills, original content creation, voice control command systems, virtual reality-based interactions etc. Kehinde and Olatunde (2022) stated that, digital skills needed by graduates of tertiary institutions in the modern workplace include information data skills, digital safety skills, cloud computing skills, word processing skills, spreadsheet skills, and internet skills. Similarly, Department of Education (2018) enumerated digital foundation skills, communication skills, information and content handling skills and problem-solving skills as major types of digital skills that help to bridge skill gap of the labour market.

Pathetically, Teltscher (2023) revealed that 64% of large enterprises and 56% of small and medium scale enterprises that recruited digital technologist in 2022 reported that vacancies in digital skills have not yet been filled. Digital skills gap represents a gap between the current capability of organization and skills it needs to achieve its goal (Manjunth, Shravan &

Dechakka, 2019). It is perceived as mismatch between employers' digital skill need and the available workforce skills. Digital skills gap reflects the level of digital proficiency of graduates and the degree of technology skill requirements to fit into labor markets. In Andriole (2018), digital skills gap is the difference between supply and demand for graduates with digital skills in the labor market. For Business Education graduates to fit into the current employment opportunities in the digital era and retain their positions, they need to possess basic digital foundation skills in a digital economy.

Digital foundation skills are significant skills for all features of 21st century works. Technology has created an opportunity for Business Education graduates to acquire digital foundation skills in order to grab up the job that will fit squarely into the digital work trend. Digital foundation skills are skills that are needed irrespective of graduate employment aspirations. They are regarded as essential for further learning, productive employment and civic engagement (UNICEF 2018). These skills according to Dixon in Akudolu and Onyeneke (2022) includes the abilities to turn on electronic devices, use the keyboard and mouse to perform digital operations, open and connect to the internet, create passwords and keep login details safe, store and retrieve information. They are basic digital skills that enables creative writing of email, make a resume, or search for specific information on the internet (Hecker & Loprest, 2019). These skills according to Hecker and Loprest make it easier for graduates to start up small and medium scale businesses and manage them successfully.

However, Hecker and Loprest (2019), lamented that several graduates lack digital foundation skills to fit into today's modern work environment. Because of the importance attached to digital foundation skills as a pre-requisite for graduate employment opportunity, vocational institutions are incorporating these skills into their programmes to match workplace requirements (Chaouchi & Bourgeau, 2020). Therefore, the teaching of digital foundation skills is a relevant and functional way of preparing graduates for the required capacity for world of work. It is however pertinent to acknowledge that, the adequacy and worth of the digital foundation skills are measured not only in terms of how far it can assist graduate to secure employment but also the extent it enables graduates to perform effectively in the digital marketing process.

As digital economy has paved way for digital marketing activities, corporate organizations are increasingly seeking graduates with digital marketing skills that will provide a platform for successful buying and selling of goods and services. Most often, efficient and sophisticated digital markets come with a better exchange system. The gap in digital marketing skills

acquisition and poor institutional design on how goods and services are sold directly or indirectly is worsening agricultural trade in Rivers State. Organizations with digital marketing skills are prone to overcoming market barriers and connect consumers and businesses on internet. Digital marketing skills therefore, are the skills and ability to buy and sell goods or services via the internet. Digital marketing skills facilitate online transactions such as transfer of money to complete transactions, display of products, and keeping in touch with customers among others. In the view of Roggio (2016), digital marketing skills consists of data analysis, search engine optimization, advertising, marketing automation, content marketing skill and email marketing. Digital marketing gap is still much a fertile ground for Business Education graduates with digital marketing skills to explore.

It was noted that, individual with digital marketing skills contributes more than 5% of total employment in China as most Chinese households are online purchasers (All Africa, 2020). Profoundly, Boston Consulting Group in Jacobs (2019) reported that, digital marketing could create around 3 million novel jobs in Africa by 2025. While World Bank (2019), affirm that digital marketing can create jobs directly as well as through logistics services and other parts of the wider digital marketing, improve household consumption and reduce inequality by bringing to people in rural areas the convenience, variety, and low prices enjoyed by urban dwellers, and contribute to economic growth by lowering the irregularity of information that cumulates economic proficiency. In the opinion of Shaw (2020), digital marketing has created employment opportunities in numerous sectors thus, Business Education graduates can brace up the opportunities created by digital marketing by developing the relevant digital marketing skills as well as data management skills.

Data management skill is another sellable skill highly needed in the labour markets. Graduates and experienced employees with data management skills now have their pick of the best digital jobs. Data management skill are the abilities to effectively manage and use information. It involves looking for patterns, understanding data base design concept and being able to participate in short and long term planning about data base project. As reported by Digital Skills Global (2021) data management skill is one of the most required skills graduates should possess in this 21st century. This skill enables graduates to make the right decision by collecting, presenting and analyzing online bulk business information. Business Education graduates require such specialized skills to help them stand out from the crowd, as they help organizations develop a digital network that will help drive digital information for business growth (Digital Skills Global, 2021). Data management skill guide companies in improving processes,

products, services and software through data analysis (Pratt & White, 2019). Therefore, effective application of digital technologies in teaching will facilitate the realization of Business Education graduate acquisition of digital skills that will curb digital skills gap and unemployment to a certain degree (Koko & Ajinwo, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

There is a great concern on the skills gap that exist between the educational institution and the workplace. Graduates have so much difficulty making transition from academic life to work even though the educational institutions to have provided the experience and training that will help graduates make intelligent occupational choices that will advance his/her career path (Ifejika, 2015). It is observable that, the level of digital skills possessed by graduates do not match the needs and demand of digital markets. Describing the Nigerian situation, it seems unemployment is not the problem of Nigeria rather Nigerian graduates are not employable or fit for today's digital environment (Teltscher, 2023). Furthermore, studies revealed that there are job opportunities in Nigeria, but graduates lack the requisite skills to harness these jobs (Koko & Ajinwo, 2022; Sunday, 2021). To an extent, this can be attributed to the fact that most higher institutions do not make use of digital resources in their academic work. Added to this is the fact that most digital facilities are not available in tertiary institutions, and where they exist, they are either not functional or inadequate. Hence, the need to examine the digital skills such as: digital foundation skills, data management skills, and digital marketing skills possessed by Business Education graduates for proper job placement. Based on the highlights, it interests the researchers to examine the relationship between digital skills gap and employment opportunities of Business Education graduates in Rivers State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between digital skills gap and Business Education graduates' employment opportunities in Rivers State. Specifically, the study examined the relationship between:

1. Digital Foundation skill gap and Business Education graduates' employment opportunities in Rivers State.
2. Digital Marketing skill gap and Business Education graduates' employment opportunities in Rivers State.
3. Data Management skill gap and Business Education graduates' employment opportunities in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between the gap in Digital Foundation skills and Business Education graduates' employment opportunities in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between the gap in Digital Marketing skills and Business Education graduates' employment opportunities in Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between the gap in Data Management skill and Business Education graduates' employment opportunities in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

1. There is no significant relationship between the gap in Digital Foundation skill and Business Education graduates' employment opportunities in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant relationship between the gap in Digital Marketing skill and Business Education graduates' employment opportunities in Rivers State.
3. There is no significant relationship between the gap in Data Management skill and Business Education graduates' employment opportunities in Rivers State.

Methodology

The study adopted the correlation research design approach. The correlation research design was adopted for the study because it is use to establish relationship between the major variables of the study mainly the independent and the dependent variables. The study was carried out in Rivers State. The population of the study consisted of one hundred and twenty-two (122) Business Education graduates working in organizations in Rivers State. The population was achievable through the use of the yellow paper. The entire population was engaged in the study, there was no need for sampling. Two sets of instruments in form of structured questionnaires were used for the study. The first instrument titled “Digital Skills Gap of Business Education Graduates Questionnaire (DSGBEQ)” and the second instrument titled “Employment Opportunities of Business Education Graduates Questionnaire (EOBEGQ)” were utilized with a modified 4-point rating scale of Strongly agreed = 4point, Agreed = 3point, Disagreed = 2point and Strongly disagreed = 1point. The instrument was validated by three experts, two in the Department of Business Education and one in Measurement and Evaluation, to determine the face and content validity of the research instrument. To ensure the consistency of the instrument, The Cronbach Alpha reliability method was adopted and the reliability Coefficient of 0.78 was established. One hundred and twenty-two (122) copies of the instrument was

administered to the respondents through personal contact, and all were duly retrieved after being filled. The data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation to test the hypotheses. The correlation coefficient obtained from PPMC was used to answer the research questions. The hypotheses were tested by testing the significance of r . This is achieved by converting the calculated value of r (r -cal) to t -test statistics. The r value between .3.00 and above shows a positive relationship, while below .3.00 shows a negative relationship.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between gap in Digital Foundation skill and Business Education graduates' employment opportunities in Rivers State?

Table 1: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship Between Gap in Digital Foundation Skill and Employment Opportunities of Business Education Graduates.

Variables		X	Y
Digital Foundation Skill(X)	Pearson Correlation	1	.411**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	122	122
Employment Opportunity(Y)	Pearson Correlation	.411**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	122	122

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The data presented in Table 1 show the correlation coefficient between the gap in digital foundation skills and graduate employment opportunities. The r value of .411, $P=0.000(<0.05)$ shows that a positive relationship exists between the two variables. This means that the higher Business Education graduates possess digital foundation skill the higher their employable opportunities and lower the digital foundation skill the lower their employable opportunities in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between the gap in Digital Marketing skill and Business Education graduate's employment opportunities in Rivers State?

Table 2: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship Between Gap in Digital Marketing Skill and Employment Opportunities of Business Education Graduates.

Variables		X	Y
Digital Marketing Skill(X)	Pearson Correlation	1	.352**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	122	122
Employment Opportunity(Y)	Pearson Correlation	.352**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	122	122

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The data presented in Table 2 shows the correlation coefficient between the gap in digital marketing skill and employment opportunities of Business Education Graduates. The r value of .352, $P=0.000(< 0.05)$ shows that a positive relationship exists between the two variables. This implies that the higher Business Education graduates possess digital marketing skill the higher their employable opportunities and the lower the digital marketing skill of Business Education graduates the lower their employable opportunities in Rivers State.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between the gap in Data Management skill and Business Education graduates' employment opportunities in Rivers State?

Table 3: Summary of Pearson Product Moment Correlation Analysis Showing the Relationship Between Gap in Data Management Skill and Employment Opportunities of Business Education Graduates.

Variables		X	Y
Digital Management Skill(X)	Pearson Correlation	1	.348**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	122	122
Employment Opportunity(Y)	Pearson Correlation	.348**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	122	122

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The data presented in Table 3 show the correlation coefficient between the gap in data management skill and employment opportunities of Business Education graduates. The PPMC r value of .348, $P=0.000(< 0.05)$ shows that a positive relationship exists between digital management skill and employment opportunities of Business Education graduates. This implies that the higher Business Education graduates possess data management skill the higher their employable opportunities and the lower the data management skill of Business Education graduates, the lower their employable opportunities in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 1

Table 4: Test of Significant Relationship Between Gap in Digital Foundation Skill and Employment Opportunities of Business Education Graduates.

Variables		X	Y
Digital Foundation Skill(X)	Pearson Correlation	1	.411**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.111
	N	122	122
Employment Opportunity(Y)	Pearson Correlation	.411**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	122	122

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4 shows the result for test of significance for the relationship between gap in digital foundation skill and employment opportunities of Business Education graduates in Rivers State. The result shows PPMC r value of .411, p value less than 0.05 at .111. Since the p-value obtained is less than the p-value provided at 0.05, the null hypothesis is not retained (that is not accepted). This implies that there is a significant relationship between the gap in digital foundation skill and employment opportunities of Business Education graduates in Rivers State. Therefore, the result suggests that a strong and positive relationship exists between digital foundation skills and graduates' employment opportunities in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 2

Table 5: Test of Significant Relationship Between Gap in Digital Marketing Skill and Employment Opportunities of Business Education Graduates.

Variables		X	Y
Digital Marketing Skill(X)	Pearson Correlation	1	.352**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.111
	N	122	122
Employment Opportunity(Y)	Pearson Correlation	.352**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	122	122

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 5 shows the result for test of significance for the relationship between the gap in digital marketing skill and employment opportunities of Business Education graduates in Rivers State. The result shows PPMC r value of .352, p value less than 0.05 at .111. Since the p-value obtained is less than the p-value provided at 0.05, the null hypothesis is not retained (that is, not accepted). This implies that there is a significant relationship between the gap in digital marketing skills and employment opportunities of Business Education graduates in Rivers State. The result suggests that a strong and positive relationship exists between digital marketing skills and graduates' employment opportunities in Rivers State.

Hypothesis 3

Table 6: Test of Significant Relationship between Gap in Data Management Skill and Employment Opportunities of Business Education Graduates.

Variables		X	Y
Digital Management Skill(X)	Pearson Correlation	1	.348**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.111
	N	122	122
Employment Opportunity(Y)	Pearson Correlation	.348**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	122	122

** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 6 shows the result for test of significance for the relationship between the gap in data management skill and employment opportunities of Business Education graduates. The result shows PPMC r value of .348, with a p-value less than 0.05 at .111. Since the p-value obtained is less than the p-value provided at 0.05, the null hypothesis is not retained (that is, not accepted). This implies that there is a significant relationship between the gap in digital management skills and employment opportunities of Business Education graduates in Rivers State. Therefore, the result suggests a strong and positive relationship exists between digital data management skills and graduates' employment opportunities in Rivers State.

Discussion

The findings of this study were discussed in consonance with the research questions as follows: The findings in research question one revealed that a positive relationship existed between the gap in digital foundation skills of Business Education graduates and their employment opportunities, with a correlation coefficient of 0.411. The test of hypothesis further showed that a significant relationship exists between digital foundation skill and employment opportunities of Business Education graduates in Rivers State. The survey is not alone in discovering this fact, but in agreement with the result of Hecker and Loprest (2019), who reported that digital foundation skill makes it easier for graduates to be employed or to start up small and medium-scale businesses and manage them successfully.

The result of research question two revealed that a positive relationship existed between the gap in digital marketing skill and graduates' employment opportunities, with a correlation coefficient of 0.352. The test of hypothesis also showed that a significant relationship exists between digital marketing skill and Business Education graduate employment opportunities in Rivers State. This finding is in consonance with the work of Shaw (2020), who averred that digital marketing has created employment opportunities in numerous sectors; thus, Business Education graduates can brace up for the opportunities created by digital marketing by developing the relevant digital marketing skills.

The result of research question three revealed that a positive relationship existed between the gap in data management skills and employment opportunities of Business Education graduates, with a correlation coefficient of 0.348. The result implies that the higher the possession of data management skills by Business Education graduates, the higher their employment opportunities in Rivers State. The finding further revealed that a significant relationship exists between the gap in data management skill and employment opportunities of Business Education graduates in Rivers State. The finding is in agreement with the result by Digital Skills Global (2021) that

posits that data management skills are one of the most required skills graduates should possess in this 21st century for suitable employment opportunities.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers concluded that for Business Education graduates to be able to fit into the digital workplace in line with the demands of the 21st-century functional and interdisciplinary markets, they need to possess certain relevant digital skills important in ensuring employment opportunities. Conversely, the low possession of digital skills will lead to a digital skills gap and subsequently, graduates' unemployment in Rivers State.

Recommendations

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

1. Business Education departments should constantly organize training programmes that will expose students to practical digital foundation skills.
2. The university community should ensure the provision of digital devices that will encourage students' acquisition of digital marketing skills.
3. To ensure graduates' employment opportunities in this digital economy, institutions should be digital-friendly to enable students' acquisition of data management skills.

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