

Gender and Information Technology Employability Skills Among Business Education Students in Tertiary Institutions in Ekiti State

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Abstract

The study investigated the information technology employability skills of tertiary institutions business education students in Ekiti State with respect to gender. Two research questions were raised to guide the study and one hypothesis was formulated. The descriptive survey design was used for this study. The sample for this consisted of 100 final year business education students who were randomly selected. The study revealed that business education students in Ekiti state are highly competent in the tested information technology skills required for employability. The study further revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female business education students in their possessed information technology skills. The study therefore concluded that there is positive relationship between the business education curriculum content and the information technology skills required for employability. The study also concluded that there is no difference between male and female business education students in Ekiti State in their possessed information technology employability skills and that gender difference should not be a barrier in the employability of the business education students. It is therefore recommended that Business education should be promoted by government and all stakeholders as the kind of education that prepares students for the world of work even in the era of technological advancement. Gender based discrimination against women in employment opportunities should be done away with since there is no recognizable difference in information technologies skills possessed by male and female business education students

Keywords: Business education, Information technology, employability, skills, gender

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Introduction

Business education is that aspect of the total education programme that provides the knowledge, skills, understanding and attitudes needed to perform in the business world as a producer and consumer of goods and services. Business education is a branch of vocational education which prepares students for the world of work (Arhueremu and Ojohwoh, 2013). It represents a broad and diverse discipline that is included in all types of education delivery system – elementary, secondary and post-secondary. Business education is education for and about business (Esene, 2012). It is training in business skills that will enable the students after graduating for university programme set-up their own businesses and run it successfully without failure (Okoro, 2013). Business education includes education for office occupations, distributions and marketing occupations, accounting, business and teaching of entrepreneurial skills. Business education is a field of study that holds great promises of employment for its recipients. Nevertheless the graduates of business education have also been plagued with the woes of unemployment. They too, like their counterparts in other fields, are at lost regarding how to be gainfully employed despite the promises of employment offered to them by business education. It seems that those promises and the contents of what they were taught in schools are different from what is obtainable in the reality of the world of work. The graduates of business education have been observed to be finding it difficult either to get paid employment or to establish their own businesses despite all the promises of employment that are offered by the business education programme. Apart from the economic downturn and scarcity of graduate level jobs, graduate employment is now closely linked to their employability.

According to Brown and Hesketh (2004) employability is the relative chances of getting and maintaining different kinds of employment. Employability not only depends on whether one is able to fulfill the requirements but also on how one stands relative to others within a hierarchy of job seekers. One of the most important factors affecting the employability of graduates in today's labour force is information technology. Based on the importance and the role of information technology skills in all sectors of the economy, both at the national and at the global level, most employers now recruit applicants with information technology skills. Advancement in Information Technology has produced major changes in the ways in which businesses operate. Almost all businesses today use computers in their day-to-day operations. With the use of computers, business is conducted

in a way quite different from that in which it was conducted in the past. In view of this, Oliver (2008) observed that since modern offices and organizations operate with and employ e-offices processes, only workers who possess electronic office operations skills will remain relevant.

It has been observed that the employability of business education graduates now depends a great deal on technology skills. In buttressing this point, Romney and Steinbart (2009) posited that an accountant has to know how to use the computer system and, more importantly, understand how transactions are recorded and updated to be able to ascertain the accuracy and reliability of the data. It is therefore important for business education students and graduates to possess information technology skills.

Information Technology Skills and Employability

Arhueremu and Ojohwoh (2013) view information technology as the acquisition, processing, storage and disseminating of vocal, pictorial, textual and numerical information by micro-electronic based combination of computerizing and telecommunication. Information technologies are now influencing every aspect of human life. They play salient roles in work places, business, education, and even entertainment. Information technology has brought a lot of changes in working conditions. According to Oduma and Ile (2012), there is virtually no vacancy in today's modern offices that the knowledge of soft skills is not required. Electronic office competencies for business education graduates are very critical. Soft skills remain the fulcrum and the basis upon which their activities and discharge of their functions in organizational offices revolve. It has been observed that employers of labour are today desirous of job seekers who possess the electronic office skills as well as those who can effectively use office technology and gadgets to discharge office functions. Some of the relevant information technology skills required of business education graduates, as identified from literature, include, among others the followings:

- Ability to make use of spreadsheets to perform accounting operations
- Ability to connect to the internet
- Ability to analyze data using computer
- Skills in using tele/video conferencing
- Ability to perform Cloud computing i.e. storing data online
- Ability to make use of word processing application software to input, retrieve and store information
- Ability to perform basic data processing
- Ability to key in data
- Ability to operate database to store data
- Ability to make use of e-mails to receive and send mails
- Ability to send and receive fax messages
- Ability to make use of power points for presentations
- Skills in the use of e-commerce to carry out business transactions online
- Ability to make use of e-business application to carry out e-banking
- Ability to make use of e-business application to carry out e-marketing
- Ability to browse the internet to retrieve information
- Ability to receive vocal messages using the internet
- Skills in the use of data security software to protect private information against unauthorized access. i.e. the use of passwords
- Skills in the use Telecommuting/tele-working
- Ability to conduct research using the internet
- Ability to key in figures in table, rows, columns, insert additional rows and delete where necessary
- Ability to identify cells, arrange, re-arrange, name or rename a cell
- Ability to cut, paste, save and retrieve information using the word processing package (Ohakwe, 2003; Chukwumezie, 2003; Olise and Ihimekpen, 2008; Okoro, 2013).

Gender and Information Technology Employability Skills

The word Gender is used to describe social and personality differences between men and women, it refers to that which society defines as masculine and feminine while sex on the other hand refers to the term that is used to classify species into either female or male. Gender is a social construct. It is about the way the society assigns roles and responsibilities to being female and male. It has been observed that gender difference has also been linked to the employability of graduates. There have been gender concerns in the area of information technology especially in developing countries as gender disparity has been observed. Wajcman (2006) observed that many feminists believe that western technology embodies patriarchal values. She further argued that most women are reluctant to go into technology because of the sex-stereotyped definition of technology as an activity appropriate for men. According to Wajcman (2006), the very language of technology, its symbolism, is masculine. It is not simply a question of acquiring skills, because these skills are embedded in a culture of masculinity that is largely coterminous with the culture of technology. Sanda and Kurfi (2013) also reiterated that despite the much emphasis

placed on the use of ICTs in Nigeria, women are usually underrepresented in terms of access and use to ICT. They also observed that though women play a pivotal role in the development of their societies, yet their impact has been silenced in this new technology due to lack of access and the necessary skills for the operation. Fenwick (2004) in Mahmood and Bokhari (2012) showed that gender inequity persists both in access to and experience of learning opportunities with ICT.

This could explain why women suffer severe setback more than men in employment opportunities especially in highly skilled jobs. It appears as if women are mostly affected by unemployment as a result of lack of information technology skills since employability is now a function of possession of information technology skills. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2018), the number of unemployed females in Nigeria is higher than that of unemployed males. The NBS (2018) reported that during the 3rd quarter of 2018, 26.6% of women within the labour force (aged 16-64 and willing, able, and actively seeking work) were unemployed. This is 6.3 percentage points higher than the unemployment rate for men (20.3%), and 3.5 percentage points higher than the reported total labour force unemployment rate, which is 23.1%. For women, this also represents a 5.4 percentage point increase in the unemployment rate from the same period of last year. Additionally, 25.9% of women in the labour force were underemployed, a 4.1 percentage point increase in underemployment for women from the previous year. This shows that women are less employed than men.

The view that graduate employability is affected by gender difference is supported by Farooq (2011) who concluded that there is still gender inequality and disparity in employment opportunities. Farooq (2011) posited that females have been facing limited participation in the labour market and more job mismatch issues due to socio-cultural constraints and labour market discriminations. According to Abass, Abdul & Abdul (2011), some people believe that certain sexes are irrelevant, weak and non-productive. Disparity and unequal treatment for the female gender is observed in the world of work as it is believed that women are less capable than men in the area of information technology. This opinion is in tandem with the finding of Hafkin and Taggart (2001) who reported that the usage of technology in developing countries is very limited among women. Hafkin further reported that women tend to be concentrated in end user, lower skilled IT jobs related to word processing or data entry and make up small percentages of managerial, maintenance, and design personnel in networks, operating systems, or software. In order words, it is believed that women are not as highly skilled as men in information technology and this has hindered their employment prospects.

Research Questions

1. To what extent do students of business education possess the required information technology skills required for employment?
2. Is there any difference in the information technology skills of male and female business education students?

Hypotheses

The following hypothesis was formulated for this study:

1. There is no significant difference between male and female business education students in their possessed information technology skills.

Research Method

Descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The population consisted of 500 business education students in Colleges of Education and Universities respectively. The sample consisted of final year business education students of College of Education, Ikere-Ekiti and University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Ikere Campus. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 100 students from the different areas of specialization in Business Education, Accounting and Office Technology and Management. A questionnaire titled 'Information Technology Employability Skills of Business Education Students' was used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire was tested for reliability using split-half method and its coefficient was 0.79 which implies that the instrument was highly reliable. Two research questions were raised to guide the study and one hypothesis was formulated. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Analysis of Results

Research Question: To what extent do students of business education possessed the required information technology skills for employment?

In analyzing the question, responses in the questionnaire on information technology skills for employment among business education students were computed. To determine the extent in which students of business education possessed information technology skills for employment, the responses were categorized into "high" and "low" extent. In the questionnaire, "High extent" was determined by adding the standard deviation to the mean ($2.79 + 0.99 = 3.78$) and "Low extent" was determined by subtracting standard deviation from the mean response ($2.79 - 0.99 = 1.80$).

The extent in which students of business education possessed information technology skills for employment is presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of respondents on the extent to which students of business education possessed information technology skills for employment

Extent of ITS Possession	Frequency and Percentage
High	61 (61%)
Low	39 (39%)
Total	100 (100%)

Source: Field Survey, 2019

The result presented in Table 1 revealed that 61% of the students had high extent of information technology skills for employment and 39% had low extent of information technology skills. The number of those who possessed information technology skills in business education was high. The fact is that most students of business education possessed information technology skills for employment after graduation.

Test of Hypothesis

1. **H₀₁:** There is no significant difference in the information technology skills of male and female business education students.

Table 2: t-test analysis of the difference in the possessed information technology skills of male and female business education students in tertiary institutions in Ekiti State

Students	N	Mean	Std. Dev	Df	T. Cal.	T. Table	Inference
Female	69	3.04	0.812	98	0.061	1.960	Not Significant
Male	31	3.03	0.948				

$P > 0.05$ (Significant)

The result of analysis presented in table 2 revealed that there is no significant difference in the possessed information technology skills of male and female business education students as $t_{cal}(0.061)$ was less than $t_{tab}(1.960)$ at 0.05 level of significance. This makes null hypothesis one not to be rejected. This means that there is no significance difference in the information technology skills possessed by male and female business education students.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that business education students in Ekiti state are highly competent in the tested information technology skills required for employability. This proves that business education students in tertiary institutions in Ekiti state have developed high skills in information technology as a result of their study in business education. This means that there is a positive relationship between the business education curriculum content and information technology required for employability in today's labour market. This finding is contrast with the finding of Ile and Okolocha (2007) who found out that business education graduates are not competent in information technology skills. The study also revealed that there is no significant difference in the possessed information technology skills of male and female business education students. This finding is in contrast with the finding of Fenwick (2004) in Mahmood and Bokhari (2012) who reported that gender inequity persists both in access to and experience of learning opportunities with ICT.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that the business education students used for the study have required information technology skills for employability, and there is positive relationship between the business education curriculum content and the information technology skills required for employability. The study also concluded that there is no difference between male and female business education students in Ekiti State in their possessed information technology employability skills. Therefore, gender difference should not be a barrier in the employability of the business education students.

Recommendations

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

1. Business education should be promoted by government and all stakeholder as the kind of education that prepares students for the world of work even in the era of technological advancement
2. Gender based discrimination against women in employment opportunities should be done away with since there is no recognizable difference in information technologies skills possessed by male and female business

education students

3. Men and women should be given equal opportunities and access in employment decisions by employers without any prejudice about women's ability to perform as much as men when it comes to information technology

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