



WORKPLACE ETHICS AND THE 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS EDUCATION GRADUATES COMPETITIVENESS

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Abstract

This study investigated workplace ethics and the 21st century business education graduates competitiveness. It focused on these two aspects of workplace ethics: integrity and professionalism. Two hypotheses guided the study. The population comprised 1,059 business education graduates between 2017/2018 and 2020/2021 academic sessions from two institutions: University of Calabar (UNICAL) and University of Cross River State (UNICROSS). 220 respondents were purposively drawn from the population as sample using snowballing and accidental sampling techniques. A validated four point rating scale structured questionnaire titled "Workplace Ethics and 21st Century Business Education Graduates Competitiveness Questionnaire" (WPEABEGCQ) was used for data collection. A reliability estimate of .81 was achieved for the instrument using Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient after a pilot test. Simple linear regression statistical technique was used in testing the hypotheses at .05 level of significance. Findings revealed among others that integrity has a significant influence on the 21st century business education graduates competitiveness. Consequently, it was recommended that the Association of Business Educators of Nigeria (ABEN) which is the apex professional body for all business educators in Nigeria should develop a handbook on workplace ethics that all her students (would-be members) would be taught with while in the university so that upon graduation, they would have been imbued with these fundamental tenets. By so doing, members of the association would have become embodiments of integrity in whichever workplace they find themselves.

Keywords: Workplace, ethics, integrity, professionalism, business education, 21st century, competitiveness

Introduction

A workplace is a spot, location or topographic point where people work or carryout their routine activities. Such location can be an office, factory, laboratory, park or school. It is commonly called a person's place of employment or any of all places where people are employed. Cambridge Dictionary defines it as *a building or room where people perform their jobs*. Defining it differently, a workplace is that usual choice location where people stay to carryout assigned jobs, projects or tasks for themselves or their recruiters in exchange for pay or as an act of service to humanity. In reality, diverse kinds of workplaces exists and they vary from one organization to another. For example, there are workplaces that operate inside a building or cabin, some operate as outdoors, while others operates as mobile outfits. Whatever the scenario especially in the 21st century, it has been widely observed that the growth of technology as it presently is has brought with it other types of workplaces such as remote workplace also known as Work From Home (WFH) or telecommuting or teleworking which allows people to work remotely as was the case during the Coronavirus pandemic. Another recent type of workplace is the virtual workplace which is a workplace that is not located in any one physical space; rather, several workplaces are technologically connected using laptops, smartphones, and video conferencing tools (Wikipedia, 2023)

Regardless of where a workplace is situated or however it appears, one defining attribute of any organization and its workplace is the present of 'ethics'. Sunanda (2018), sees ethics as the principle that describes behavior as being right, good and/or proper. Adeyeye, Adeniji, Osinbanjo and Oludayo (2015) termed ethics as the science which deals with morals. In their averment, ethics is perceived as the systematic study of the fundamental principles of the moral law or as normative science of human conduct. As it concerns work, Said, Alam and Khalid (2016), views work ethics as the accepted standards in terms of personal and social welfare of employee, their work attitudes, self- discipline and commitment to their assignments. Corroborating this vivid definition, Vaslasquaez in Adeyeye, Adeniji, Osinbanjo and Oludayo (2015) described workplace ethics as the principles of conduct governing an individual or a group in the workplace that makes them conform to the ethical standards which influences organizational outputs, profitability level, as well as competitiveness.

In a nutshell, ethics connotes a universally accepted set of moral creeds. To this end, Rosmi and Syamsir (2021) identified key workplace ethical behaviours to include honesty, integrity, fairness, and



concern for others. Sunanda (2018) listed what constitute workplace ethics to be; respect, trustworthiness, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship personal and professional beliefs. Without mincing words, at its core, workplace ethics narrows down to moral philosophy or creedal. It is framed by how an individual or organization's morality influences the decisions made and the behaviours exhibited within its jurisdiction. The essentiality of workplace ethics therefore cannot be overemphasized in that, an organization that does not advocate ethical principles often suffers unexplainable consequences; and any unethical practice that is not reprimanded early enough usually undermine the moral fabric of such an entity. Some of the repercussions of an absence of workplace ethics include but not limited to: pilferage, misappropriation of business funds and assets, corporate reputation soiling, high labour turnover, low employee productivity, declining profitability, as well as overtly uncompetitive business climate.

In any organization, therefore, among the employees expected to possess workplace ethics are graduates from diverse disciplines including those of business education. This is because business education programme is a specialized profession designed to provide its learners' with the knowledge, skills and competencies that will lead to employability and advancement in office occupations, pedagogical skills in teaching business subjects at various levels of educational system as well as self-employment or as employers of labour. Its major aim has been said to be the filling of the gap between knowledge and practice by exposing students to general education as well as specialized areas in accounting, entrepreneurship, marketing, and office management (Edet, 2020; The National Universities Commission Core Curriculum Minimum Academic Standard (NUC, CCMAS, 2022). On their part, Edet, Onabe and Udida (2017) conceptualized vocational business education as a programme of studies involving the development of a stock of manipulative skills, refined attitude and knowledge that enable individual learner handle assigned tasks proficiently in choice vocation or workplace. Thusly, prior to graduation, business education students ought to be loaded with substantial dose of workplace ethics that will appropriately actuate those stock of manipulative skills, refined attitudes and knowledge for their self-benefits as well as the society.

Equipping oneself with workplace ethics is not only useful or applicable in multinational or large corporations, even small and medium business enterprises (SMEs) are good platforms where workplace ethics should be visibly seen, heard and practiced among the various stakeholders in the ordinary course of business. The imperative that this holds includes but not confined to the fact that SMEs can grow into large businesses as Egu, Edet and Iniewe (2023) rightly explained. According to the trio scholars, SMEs sector in Nigeria is strategically positioned to absorb up to 80 percent of jobs, improve per capita income, increase value addition to raw materials supply, improve export earnings, enhance capacity utilization in key industries and unlock economic expansion and GDP growth. Suffice it is to aver that this can be truly harnessed by business education graduates to the extent that they remain competitively relevant through inundation with the right mix of workplace ethics. As a matter of fact, most business education graduates engage themselves in SMEs because as asserted further by Egu, Edet and Iniewe (2023), SMEs has for a long time carved a niche for itself as the lynchpin of major developed economies and portend to be the lifeline for developing economies. The authors added that SMEs has established itself as an important contributor to employment generation, poverty reduction, income distribution as well as economic and export growth as these forms the metrics for ranking countries in the 21st century.

The 21st (twenty-first) century according to Wikipedia (2023) is the current century in the *Anno Domini* era or Common Era, under the Gregorian calendar. It began on 1 January 2001 and will end on 31 December 2100. Implying that we in year 2023 in the 21st century (Edet & Udida, 2023). In this century, not only has technology fitly permeated a large gamut of society's everyday endeavour and thus become the "nitty-gritty" of living, workplace ethics has equally become the sine qua non for competitiveness. In this era, therefore, what students learn ought to be basically updated and significantly modified because what matters to employers when recruiting nowadays has shifted from the usual possession of technical knowledge and skills inherent in the courses studied by job seekers when in school as students to the acquisition of ethical values, principles and/or behavior. This discovery hinges on the fact that there is an over-abundance supply of graduates in various disciplines from where selections can be made from. What therefore influences the choice of employers when recruiting is whether job seekers are laden with workplace ethics? This has assumed a towering dimension because as knowledge of technology and its benefits increases, modern ways of thievery and becoming intentionally deceptive and shamefacedly fraudulent has equally been advanced. Such deceitful schemes includes credit and debit card fraud, identity theft, imposter scam, payroll and insider fraud, accounting and invoice fraud, assets misappropriation, misuse and fraud, counterfeit payment and refund fraud, advanced fee scams among



others (Ravichandran, 2023). Some of the endemic cases of unethical practices that have occurred in some workplaces in Nigeria in recent time are as follows:

The announcement by the House of Representatives Committee on Public Accounts that it has uncovered how the federal Fire Service expended over N1 billion on recruitment and logistics between 2017 and 2022 without recourse to laid down financial rules (Abulu & Akubo, 2022).

The case of the former Accountant General of the federation, Ahmed Idris who was arrested and suspended from service following allegations that he dubiously carted away the sum of N80 billion through bogus consultancy contracts and other illegal activities using proxies, associates and family members. Later in the same month of May, 2022, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, announced that it had discovered another N90 billion alleged fraud involving the same suspended Accountant-General of the Federation, Ahmed Idris who was later remanded at the Kuje Correctional Facility, Abuja on the order of the court, on charges of stealing and criminal breach of trust to the tune of N109.4 billion (Ejekwonyilo, 2022).

The announcement by the Chairman of the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission, ICPC on October 28, 2021 that the agency recovered a total of 301 houses alleged to be owned by two public officers in the Federal Capital Territory. While speaking at the inauguration of the House of Representatives ad-hoc Committee on Investigation of the Operations of Real Estate Developers, the ICPC chairman explained that while 241 buildings were recovered from one of the suspects at different locations within the FCT, the remaining 60 were recovered on a large expanse of land at another location (Ojo, 2021).

A report from Daily Trust (2021) that in 2020, the former Head of Civil Service, Winifred Oyo Ita was arraigned alongside Garba Umar and Ubong Okon Effiok on bribery charges to the tune of N467 million. The companies listed were Frontline Ace Global Services Ltd, Asanaya Projects Ltd, Slopes International Ltd, Good deal Investment Ltd and Prince Mega Logistics Ltd.

Also, Atakpa and Akpan (2023) chronicled that the former Chairman of the defunct Pension Reforms Taskforce Team, Abdurashheed Maina alongside his son, Faisal, had been standing trial before an Abuja High Court, on a 12 and 3 counts charges respectively, over the alleged money laundering of the sum of N2 billion pension funds. He was reported to have jumped bail and absconded to the Niger Republic where he was re-arrested on November 30, 2020, and had been in custody since then. Relatedly, the authors equally reiterated the case involving five people, including the former Director of the Police Pension Fund, Esai Dangabar, who were accused of misusing N32.8 billion from the Police Pension Fund. Mr Dangabar accused some committee members of the Senate of benefiting from the loots. Premium Times (2020) reported that the Senate denied the allegation without ordering an investigation and nothing has been heard of the case till date. Atakpa and Akpan (2023) also added that since 2017, a former Group Managing Director of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, Andrew Yakubu, has been standing trial for money laundering after the sums of \$9,772,800 and £74,000 respectively were recovered from his home in Kaduna.

Soyele (2023) brought to the fore the trial of an ex-Director General of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), Patrick Akpobolokemi and five others for allegedly converting to their personal use, a total of N2, 658,957,666 belonging to NIMASA. Again, Atakpa and Akpan (2023) articulated that in March 2011, ten suspects from the office of the Head of the Civil Service of the Federation were arraigned alongside 30 companies on a 134-count charge for allegedly defrauding the Pensions Account of the Office of the Head of Service of the Federation to the tune of over N30 billion. The scholars went on to assert that in December 2013, the EFCC affirmed it found out that Steve Oronsanye, a former Head of Service and other top directors of the civil service allegedly conspired and defrauded the country of N6.2 billion pension fund. The Money was alleged to have been stolen through complex contracts for biometric enrolment and payment for computer accessories that were never supplied.

There is also the case of a former Comptroller of the Nigerian Customs Service, Abdullahi Dikko, investigated for fraud for diverting the sum of N40b from the agency's coffers (Odunsi, 2016) He later returned the sum of N1bn to the federal government (Oluwagbemi, 2016) and had the charges dismissed by the federal high court, Abuja because of the inability of the anti-graft agency to apprehend him, because he (Dikko) jumped bail and fled the country (Sanni, 2020). There is the trial of 2 retired senior military officers, Sarki Yarki-Bello, a retired General and Director of Counter Terrorism and Bello Fadike, a retired Colonel who worked with the former National Security Adviser, Mr Sambo Dasuki (who himself was under trial for allegedly diverting the sum of \$2.1 billion meant for the purchase of arms) (Ibekwe, 2016). Anazodo, Okoye and Chukwuemeka, (2012) reported that in 2001, a Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Defence was accused of embezzling funds amounting to N450 million and that between 1993 and 2000, the chairperson of the Educational Tax Fund (ETF), and the Accountant General of the Federation, the former



Chairman of the Federal Inland Revenue Services, were alleged to have contemporaneously embezzled funds of the ETF to the tune of N40 billion. Also, there was a currency fraud in which the accused persons: Patience Okoro Eye, Afolabi Olufemi Johnson, Ilori Adekunle Sunday Kolawole Babalola, Olaniran Muniru Adeola and Fatai Adedokun Yusuf, were prosecuted by the EFCC for over N8 billion mutilated currency “recycling” fraud (Mutum 2015). There is also the case of the national identity card scheme which saw US \$214 million go down the drain with nobody able to account for it (Daily Sun, June 14, 2010). Amidst all these, the former Minister of Information and Culture, Lai Mohammed, at a press conference in Abuja on Monday, January 17 2016 announced during a National Sensitization Campaign against corruption that 12 former civil servants stole over N14.18 billion, while 8 people in the banking industry allegedly pilfered N524 billion (Tukur, 2016).

Apparently in the 21st century, there is widespread corruption, grand larceny, large-scale frauds and overt thieving with impunity. With such unblushing corruption profile, it is clear that workplace ethics are non-existence. Hence the impairment of virtue and weakened moral principles. From the foregoing, two workplace ethics namely: integrity and professionalism have been selected for investigation in this study. This is because integrity and professionalism have become the twin workplace ethics that knit global business partners, associates, subsidiaries and allies together in a synergetic business relationships. Therefore, these twosome workplace ethics ought to be innately ingrained into the consciousness of business education graduates in the course of their studentship and showcased in the course of their everyday dealings in today’s 21st century competitive workplace.

Integrity is the practice of being honest and showing a consistent and uncompromising adherence to strong moral and ethical principles and values. Viewed from ethical perspective, integrity is regarded as the honesty and truthfulness or earnestness of one’s actions. The word ‘Integrity’ which can stand in sharp contrast to hypocrisy considers internal consistency as a virtue, and suggests that people who hold apparently conflicting values should account for their discrepancy (Wikipedia, 2023). Wikipedia went further to assert that the word *integrity* emanates from the Latin adjective ‘*integer*’, meaning *whole* or *complete*. In this context, integrity is perceived to be the inner sense of “wholeness” deriving from qualities such as honesty and consistency of character.

Incontestably, integrity underlie the lineament of every affinity, connection, affiliation, responsibility, project and association with which individuals are involved in. It is the indispensable prerequisite upon which every genuine and reliable business success rests (Egu, Edet & Iniewe, 2023). Integrity according to Azhar (2013) is a factual asset that can be contrived, and it can also be stultified. Fundamentally, it is worth stating that integrity takes time to regain when lost and, in a bid to jealously preserve this sacred virtue, organizations and their employees need commitment, determination, firm belief and fierceness in upholding its tenets. An individual has ethical integrity to the extent that the person’s actions, beliefs, methods, measures, and principles are all consistent with his or her actions, activities and conducts.

Integrity in any workplace is abidingly significant in ensuring that issues like fraud, pilferage, corrupt practices and other shoddy deals in all its forms are trimmed to its barest minimum and ultimately stamp out, while punitive measures are meted out to culprits so that public confidence in the workplace is not scotched (Johari, Alam & Said, 2021). Also, failure to encourage the practice of integrity in the workplace may fuel mismanagement, abuse of positions of responsibility, and can bring about conflicts of interest and fraud (Said, Alam & Khalid 2016). Such practices if left unchecked may become part of an “enterprise culture” which may convince other people within the organization’s sphere of influence to construe that “bending the rules” for personal or corporate advantage is a mark of personal or business smartness (Ssonko, 2010). Shockingly, Irianto in Irianto, Novianti, Rosalina, & Firmanto, (2012) indicted that unethical behavior in the educational environment (like the university) is a predictor of unethical behavior in the workplace. The author however, did not advance any reason to buttress this assertion. But, Brass, Butterfield, and Skaggs in Irianto, Novianti, Rosalina, & Firmanto, (2012) espoused that unethical behavior is caused by two main factors, which are individual factors and workplace factors. Individual factor in their postulation include things like: locus of control and cognitive moral development which lead to compromised integrity. While workplace factors are organizational climate, compensation system, absence of code of conducts, and prevailing norms.

Happenings that reveal an absence of ethics in the workplace are not only prevalent in Nigeria but exists in other countries workplaces. In Malaysia for example, Chan (2016) reported that there have been issues associated with the absence of integrity and issues that cast aspersions on the integrity of public office holders. The author went on to list public offices where integrity violations took place. In Indonesia, Irianto, Novianti, Rosalina, & Firmanto, (2012) trot out that available facts showed that between 2004 and 2010, 147 head of regions in Indonesia were involved in different shades of corrupt cases. Out of 33



provinces in Indonesia, 18 governors and one vice governor were robbed in corruption case. While in regional and city level, there were 84 regents, 17 mayors, 86 vice regents, and 19 deputy mayors involved in corruption activities. The total loss of the state to corruption cases by various heads of regency within the last five years the report said had reached approximately 4.4 billion rupiahs.

Johari, Alam and Said (2021) did a study on the influences of accountability, risk management and managerial commitment on practices of integrity in the Malaysian public sector. Finding from the study revealed that risk management, accountability and management commitment have a significant effect in shaping the integrity of the public sector. From the finding, it was concluded that every departments in the ministries should publish a public report on the ethics and integrity activities undertaken by them to develop good governance practices and societal outcomes.

Irianto, Novianti, Rosalina, & Firmanto, (2012) investigated integrity, unethical behaviour, and tendency of fraud in Indonesia. The result showed that ethical environment could drive decision based on ethical principles rather than personal interest. In other words, the tendency of fraud may be reduced by the existence of ethical culture in the workplace. Thus, by improving integrity, actions of fraud can be greatly reduced or terminated. A study by Hollinger and Clark cited in Yekini, Ohalehi, Oguchi, and Abiola, (2017) found that employee theft was mainly due to workplace conditions. A key conclusion from the study was that employee theft was caused by job dissatisfaction.

Professionalism another type of workplace ethics is defined by Merriam Webster Dictionary as *“the conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or a professional person.”* In other words, professionalism means both the opened and concealed behavior and the attitude of a person in a workplace that point at his or her work ethics and personal traits. In every workplace, employers expect professional behaviors from their employees and vice versa. Regrettably, there is no set out rulebook or guideline on professionalism or professional conducts in most professions for their practitioners. In most cases, there exist a common perception among people regarding their behavior in a certain environment. A few scholars have attempted a definition of the term 'professionalism'. For Gani (2009), professionalism constitute the actions or attitude of an employee that is consistent, assertive and discipline in nature thus, portraying the employee as a professional, making it very good and important indicant for improving performance. In the words of Kristin and Arja Sadjarto (2013), professionalism is the ability and skills of a person to carry out workplace tasks in consonance with their areas of studies and procedures in a timely and accurate manner based on their respective exposure levels.

Professionalism in the workplace is so important that Ridewan (2016) opined that employee performance will be increased if an employee is able to work with it at a high altitude. To ascertain if an employee is exhibiting professionalism in the discharge of his or her duties, Pratiwi (2017) enumerated several indicators to measure employee performance. According to the author, such pointers include: self-development, integrity, trust, ethical consideration, teamwork, and punctuality. But Rosmi and Syamsir (2021) highlights the followings as common features of professionalism: punctuality, formal and sophisticated dressing considered as appropriate demeanor for a workplace, decent and mannered way of communication within a work environment, help rendered to a colleague or client, giving sound advice instead of pushing others down, sticking to work-related commitments and deadlines. Other marks of professionalism in the workplace include being forthright, showing expertise, adroitness, deftness, adeptness, dexterity and proficiency. In précis, professionalism does not connote wearing a suit or carrying a briefcase; rather, it means conducting oneself with responsibility, integrity, accountability, and excellence. It means communicating effectively and appropriately and always finding a way to be productive. Often, they are usually unspoken guidelines that include many things under professional behavior. It may even be subjective to different workplaces.

Rajan (2019) studied professionalism and productivity: an empirical based comparative study among managers. The study sampled 80 managers (40 paramedical and 40 nonmedical managers) from selected leading private multi-specialty hospitals using purposive sampling technique. Data was collected using questionnaire and other secondary sources. Percentage, mean, standard deviation and coefficient of variation were used in analysing the data. The results of the comparative study indicated that professionalism related factors have been highly perceived by nonmedical managers. Based on this, suitable recommendations were made to improve productivity of the managers of both categories.

Rosmi and Syamsir (2021) studied the effect of integrity and professionalism on employee performance in a digital era. The study sought to determine the effect of integrity and professionalism on employee performance in a digital era in the Bungo Regency Regional Secretariat Office, Indonesia. Findings revealed among others that professionalism influences employees' performance. Based on this, it



was recommended among others that employees should cultivate and bring to fusion professional conducts while carrying out their duties so that their competitiveness can be increased.

Competitiveness is defined by Cambridge Dictionary as the fact of a person wanting very much to win or be more successful than other people, or the ability of people to compete successfully. Helmreich and Spence in Michaela, Anthony, Eze, Chinwed. and Ikechukwu (2018) see competitiveness to mean the desire to win against others in interpersonal situations. Ma'dan, Ismail. & Daud (2020) articulated that in a workplace, a competitive human capital will be able to face any challenge real or perceived that will promote the course of the organization. Therefore, it remains arguable that competitive attitude among business education graduates is a very important characteristic that should be given attention, especially among training institutions like the universities. If this assertion is true, what influence then does workplace ethics have on the 21st century business education graduates competitiveness? The quest towards answering this toughie drove the researcher to undertake this study.

The following hypotheses guided the study:

1. Integrity has no significant influence on the 21st century business education graduate competitiveness
2. Professionalism has no significant influence on the 21st century business education graduate competitiveness

Method

The study adopted survey research design involving the use of questionnaire in a bid to gather information on workplace ethics and the 21st century business education graduate competitiveness. Specifically, the study investigated integrity and professionalism and was guided by two hypotheses. The study area was Cross River State, one of the thirty-six states in Nigeria. The population for the study was 1,059 business education graduates between 2017/2018 and 2020/2021 academic sessions from University of Calabar (UNICAL) and University of Cross River State (UNICROSS). Out of which 220 was selected as sample using snowballing and accidental sampling techniques. This is shown in Table 1. A validated four point rating scale structured questionnaire titled "Workplace Ethics and 21st Century Business Education Graduates Competitiveness Questionnaire" (WPEABEGCQ) was used for data collection. A reliability estimate of .81 was achieved for the instrument using Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient after a pilot test. The instrument was administered personally by the researcher with the help of three research assistants. This was done after relevant information about the problem being investigated was explained to the respondents. Simple linear regression statistical technique was used in testing the hypotheses at .05 level of significance.

Table 1: Population and sample distribution of the study

S/n	Institution	Option of study	Population	Sample
1	UNICAL	Accounting	183	38
		Management	251	53
		Marketing	66	12
2.	UNICROSS	Accounting	252	53
		Management	307	64
		Total	1,059	220

Results

Hypothesis one: Integrity has no significant influence on the 21st century business education graduate competitiveness.

Test for significance was done using simple linear regression statistical tool and tested .05 level if significance. A summary of the result is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Simple linear regression analysis on the influence of integrity on 21st century business education graduate competitiveness

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Standard Error of the Estimate
1	.620	.539	.578	1.022

Model	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F.	P. value
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Regression	3528	1	3.582	205.61	.031
Residual	6177	219	1.013		
Total	9705	220			

$P < .05$; $df = 1$; 219 ; $f = 5.421$

From table 2 above, integrity influenced 21st century business education graduate competitiveness at .539. This means that as business education graduates exhibits integrity, their workplace competitiveness is enhanced. From the correlation coefficient, an R Square of .539 was obtained. This means that about 53.9% of the total variation in the competitiveness of the program's graduates is accounted for by the exhibition of integrity. The F-ratio of 205.61 is greater than the critical f-value of 5.421 with 1 and 219 degree of freedom. Also, the table showed a p-value of .031 less than 0.05 alpha level. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected; meaning that integrity has a significant influence on 21st century business education graduate competitiveness.

Hypothesis two: Professionalism has no significant influence on the 21st century business education graduate competitiveness.

Test for significance was done using simple linear regression statistical tool and tested .05 level if significance. A summary of the result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Simple linear regression analysis on the influence of professionalism on 21st century business education graduate competitiveness

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Standard Error of the Estimate
1	.542	.513	.501	1.103

Model	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F.	P. value
Regression	3456	1	3.328	196.32	.029
Residual	5321	219	1.124		
Total	8777	220			

$P < .05$; $df = 1$; 219 ; $F = 5.421$

From table 3 above, professionalism influenced 21st century business education graduate competitiveness at .513. This means that as business education graduates exhibits professionalism, their workplace competitiveness is enhanced. From the correlation coefficient, an R Square of .501 was obtained. This means that about 50.1% of the total variation in the competitiveness of the program's graduates is accounted for by the exhibition of professionalism. The F-ratio of 196.32 is greater than the critical f-value of 5.421 with 1 and 219 degree of freedom. Also, the table showed a p-value of .029 less than 0.05 alpha level. Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected; meaning that professionalism has a significant influence on 21st century business education graduate competitiveness.

Discussion of findings

Findings regarding hypothesis one revealed that integrity has a significant influence on the 21st century business education graduates competitiveness. This implies that with integrity, business education graduates would soar upwards competitively, but if integrity is downplayed, trivialized or disparaged, then the assertion of Said, Alam & Khalid (2016) that failure to encourage the practice of integrity in the workplace may fuel mismanagement, abuse of positions of responsibility and ultimately conflicts of interest and fraud will play out. This finding also vindicate Egu, Edet and Iniewe (2023) who articulated that integrity underlie the lineament of every affinity, connection, affiliation, responsibility, project and association with which individuals are involved in, and that it is the indispensable prerequisite upon which every genuine and reliable business success rests.

The second finding indicates that professionalism has a significant influence on the 21st century business education graduate competitiveness. This revelation supports Gani (2009) for positing that professionalism constitute the actions or attitude of an employee that is consistent, assertive and discipline in nature thus, portraying the employee as a professional, making it very good and important indicant for improving performance and competitiveness. This finding also lend credence to the averment of Ridewan (2016) that employee performance will be increased if an employee is able to work at a high altitude of professionalism.

Conclusion

Based on the findings in this study, it was concluded that the duet workplace ethics of integrity and professionalism exert significant influence on the 21st century business education graduates competitiveness. As such, concerted efforts should be geared towards ensuring that all university business



education students are infused with the gamut of workplace ethics before graduation. If this is done, they will be competitively advantageous than their folks in other disciplines in the 21st century world of work.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were advanced based on the findings of the study:

1. The Association of Business Educators of Nigeria (ABEN) should develop a handbook on workplace ethics that all her students (would-be members) would be taught with while in the university so that upon graduation, they would have been imbued with these fundamental tenets. By so doing, members of the association would have become embodiments of integrity in whichever workplace they find themselves.
2. The Association of Business Educators of Nigeria (ABEN), which is the apex professional body for all business educators in Nigeria should deliberately script an operable code of professional conducts that all practicing business educators will adhere to. This policy document when effective, should be made available to all final year students in all universities in what could be termed an 'oath taking ceremony' wherein they will pledge to carry out their assigned duties as trained business educators with utmost professionalism.

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