INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY SKILLS NEEDED BY BUSINESS EDUCATION STUDENTS FOR SELF-SUSTENANCE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This study investigated the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills needed by business education students for self-sustenance and national development. Three specific purposes and three research questions guided the study. The study comprised final-year business education students in tertiary institutions offering business education in Ebonyi State. The population consisted of 64 students, and the entire population was studied because it was manageable. Data were collected using a 30-item structured questionnaire, titled the Business Education Students Information and Communication Technology Skills (BESICTS), based on a four-point Likert scale. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The findings showed that computer operating skills, digital marketing skills, and communication skills were generally needed by business education students for self-sustenance and national development. Specifically, the cluster means for computer operating, digital marketing, and communication skills were 2.70, 2.71, and 2.69, respectively. The study concludes that ICT skills are important for preparing business education students for contemporary work and entrepreneurial opportunities. It recommends that business education students should be sensitized to the importance of acquiring relevant ICT skills, tertiary institutions should be adequately equipped with ICT resources and reliable electricity, and lecturers should participate in regular ICT-related capacity-building programmes.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technology skills; Business Education; self-sustenance; national development.

Introduction

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has transformed virtually every discipline and sphere of life. It is applied in homes, business offices, schools, and the entertainment industry. The convergence of communication and telecommunications technologies has made ICT a central feature of contemporary society and has brought significant changes to the ways people live, learn, communicate, and work. Over the last two decades, businesses and organizations have experienced substantial changes in their operations as a result of rapid ICT development.

The rapid advancement of ICT has increased the need for ICT education at all levels of education. Individuals require appropriate digital competencies to function effectively in the workplace and contribute meaningfully to national development. For business education students to become self-reliant and contribute productively to society, they need functional, knowledge-driven education that combines theoretical understanding with practical skills.

Ajisafe, Bolarinwa and Edeh (2015), as cited in Oluwole (2018), described education as a potent vehicle for national transformation and development. Education contributes to manpower development, wealth creation, individual success, social progress, self-realization, and broader

societal development. Amadi and King (2018) similarly emphasized the importance of education in supporting economic and social development. Consequently, education should provide learners with appropriate skills, competencies, and abilities for effective participation in society.

Business education is one of the vocational programmes through which learners can acquire marketable skills for self-sustenance and national development. Nwosu, Amaobi and Onyemaobi (2021) described business education as a component of education that develops demonstrable skills that can be applied to productive and economic livelihoods. Business education is skill-oriented and contributes to human-capital development across sectors of the economy. Obi (2021) noted that business education contributes significantly to economic development, while Ojianyaegbu (2021) identified the empowerment of students with desirable skills, knowledge, and values for gainful employment and self-reliance as an important objective.

Business education therefore provides an important platform for equipping students with ICT knowledge and skills required in contemporary workplaces. In an economy characterized by technological change and unemployment, the ability to use digital technologies can expand opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship, business communication, marketing, and service delivery. Appropriate ICT skills can also help graduates create value rather than depend solely on conventional white-collar employment.

ICT refers broadly to technological tools and resources used to communicate, create, disseminate, store, process, and manage information. These technologies include computers, the internet, broadcasting technologies, and telephones (Abduraman, Yahya & Suleiman, 2014). ICT can stimulate innovation, improve productivity, facilitate interaction with the global economy, and support economic development when accompanied by appropriate policies, infrastructure, and human capabilities.

Advances in ICT and automation have increased the complexity of skills required in contemporary workplaces. Akaninwor (2010), as cited in the source manuscript, emphasized the need for education that equips individuals with knowledge, understanding, and skills for effective participation in society. Business education students therefore need ICT competencies that correspond to current workplace and entrepreneurial demands.

In this study, ICT skills are understood as the ability to use available electronic and digital technologies to perform relevant business and office tasks effectively. Information technology has been described as a foundation for national survival and development in a rapidly changing global environment (Ekpenyong, Ogbeide & Robinson, 2012). ICT has changed workplace processes and methods of performing tasks, with implications for productivity, employment, entrepreneurship, and national development.

National development involves positive changes in the economic, social, cultural, political, institutional, and physical well-being of a nation. Enyekit and Ogwunte (2018) linked development with improvements in productivity and socio-economic conditions, while Ezeani and Falade (2018) viewed national development in terms of positive growth, modernization, and changes in the conditions of communities and society. Within this context, equipping business education students with relevant ICT skills can support both individual economic participation and broader national development.

Despite the incorporation of ICT into educational curricula, many graduates continue to experience difficulties in securing employment. This raises questions about whether students are acquiring the practical ICT competencies required to participate effectively in contemporary workplaces and entrepreneurial activities. It is against this background that the present study investigated the ICT skills needed by business education students for self-sustenance and national development.

Statement of the Problem

The changing labour-market environment has increased the complexity of skills required of contemporary workers. Employers increasingly expect applicants to possess ICT competencies,

while technological change continues to alter the nature of work. Although ICT has been incorporated into educational curricula and government policies have emphasized the acquisition of relevant skills, many graduates, including business education graduates, continue to experience unemployment and underemployment. One possible concern is the gap between exposure to ICT education and the practical skills required for effective employment and self-employment. If business education students do not acquire relevant ICT competencies, their capacity to compete in the contemporary labour market and create sustainable livelihoods may be limited. The problem of this study, therefore, is to determine the ICT skills needed by business education students for self-sustenance and national development in Ebonyi State.

Research Questions

1. What are the computer operating skills needed by business education students for self-sustenance and national development?
2. What are the digital marketing skills needed by business education students for self-sustenance and national development?
3. What are the communication skills needed by business education students for self-sustenance and national development?

Method

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The study was conducted in Ebonyi State and covered final-year business education students in tertiary institutions offering business education in the state. The population comprised 64 students. Because the population was small and manageable, the entire population was studied; thus, no sampling procedure was applied.

Data were collected using a 30-item structured questionnaire titled the Business Education Students Information and Communication Technology Skills (BESICTS). The instrument was structured on a four-point Likert scale. The response categories and decision boundaries were as follows:

Response category	Points	Boundary limit
Highly Needed (HN)	4	3.1 – 4.0
Needed (N)	3	2.1 – 3.0
Fairly Needed (FN)	2	1.1 – 2.0
Not Needed (NN)	1	0.1 – 1.0

Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. A mean score within the stated boundary limits was used to determine the respondents' level of need for each skill.

Results

Research Question One

What are the computer operating skills needed by business education students for self-sustenance and national development?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of computer operating skills needed by business education students for self-sustenance and national development

S/N	Item statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Identify the basic components of the computer	2.5	1.25	N
2	Describe different components of the computer system	2.8	1.4	N
3	Identify the roles of operating systems	2.6	1.3	N
4	Acquire skills in booting the computer system	2.5	1.25	N
5	Log in to the Windows environment	2.6	1.3	N
6	Acquire file-management skills	2.8	1.4	N
7	Demonstrate keyboarding skills	3.0	1.5	N
8	Identify different operating systems	2.5	1.25	N
9	Use the file system	2.7	1.35	N
10	Use help menus on the computer	2.6	1.3	N
11	Apply text-editing skills	3.0	1.5	N
12	Run more than one programme at a time	2.8	1.4	N
13	Run print setup	2.7	1.35	N

Cluster Mean = 2.70

Table 1 shows that all 13 computer operating skills had mean scores ranging from 2.50 to 3.00, which fall within the 'Needed' category. The cluster mean of 2.70 further indicates that computer operating skills were generally needed by business education students for self-sustenance and national development. The standard deviations ranged from 1.25 to 1.50, indicating variation in respondents' ratings across the items.

Research Question Two

What are the digital marketing skills needed by business education students for self-sustenance and national development?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Digital marketing skills needed by business education students for self-sustenance and national development

S/N	Item statement	Mean	SD	Decision
14	Advertise online	3.0	1.5	N
15	Place sales online	2.9	1.45	N
16	Chat with and persuade customers online	3.0	1.5	N
17	Acquire skills in using various social media platforms	3.0	1.5	N
18	Create online awareness	2.8	1.4	N
19	Design and create email messages	2.0	1.0	FN
20	Collect, interpret, and utilize data from various marketing channels	2.0	1.0	FN
21	Build strong online customer relationships	2.8	1.4	N
22	Identify online marketing customers	2.5	1.25	N
23	Establish a good online marketing plan	3.0	1.5	N

Cluster Mean = 2.71

Table 2 shows that eight of the ten digital marketing skills were rated as needed, with mean scores ranging from 2.50 to 3.00. Items 19 and 20 recorded mean scores of 2.00 and were therefore classified as fairly needed based on the decision boundaries stated in the methodology. The cluster mean of 2.71 indicates that digital marketing skills were generally needed by business education students for self-sustenance and national development.

Research Question Three

What communication skills are needed by business education students for self-sustenance and national development?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of communication skills needed by business education students for self-sustenance and national development

S/N	Item statement	Mean	SD	Decision
24	Speak effectively with customers	3.0	1.5	N
25	Obtain relevant feedback from customers	2.5	1.25	N
26	Hold video conferences with selected audiences	2.5	1.25	N
27	Compose and send emails to customers	3.0	1.5	N
28	Effectively engage in online advertising	2.0	1.0	FN
29	Use English to pass information effectively	2.8	1.4	N
30	Answer telephone calls in a pleasant and efficient manner	3.0	1.5	N

Cluster Mean = 2.69

Table 3 indicates that six of the seven communication skills were rated as needed, with mean scores ranging from 2.50 to 3.00. Item 28, effective engagement in online advertising, recorded a mean score of 2.00 and was classified as fairly needed. The cluster mean of 2.69 indicates that communication skills were generally needed by business education students for self-sustenance and national development.

Discussion of Findings

The findings show that computer operating skills are needed by business education students for self-sustenance and national development. All 13 computer operating skills recorded mean scores within the 'Needed' category, with a cluster mean of 2.70. The result suggests that students require practical competence in basic computer operations, file management, keyboarding, text editing, operating systems, and related tasks. This finding is consistent with Akwa Jon, Nimpel and Nguwap (2018), who emphasized the importance of ICT skills such as internet use, local-area-network use, website creation, online communication, browsing, and downloading information for business operations. It also agrees with Oborah (2008), who argued that graduates without ICT skills may face difficulties in the contemporary world of work.

The findings further indicate that digital marketing skills are generally needed by business education students. Eight of the ten skills were rated as needed, while designing and creating email messages and collecting, interpreting, and utilizing data from marketing channels were rated as fairly needed. The cluster mean of 2.71 indicates an overall need for digital marketing competence. These findings are consistent with the American Marketing Association (2019), which describes digital marketing in terms of marketing activities conducted through digital technologies and channels that facilitate interaction and engagement between organizations and consumers. The findings also correspond with Kingsnorth (2019), who identified search-engine optimization, content marketing, social media marketing, email marketing, digital advertising, analytics, and conversion optimization as important areas of digital marketing. Such competencies can support students in promoting products, reaching customers, building relationships, and developing entrepreneurial opportunities.

Communication skills were also generally rated as needed, with a cluster mean of 2.69. Respondents rated effective customer communication, customer feedback, video conferencing, email communication, effective use of English, and telephone communication as needed. Effective engagement in online advertising recorded a lower mean of 2.00 and was classified as fairly needed. The overall finding supports Afolabi, Segun and Fawale (2021), who identified communication skills, particularly listening and speaking, as important for entrepreneurship and sustainable development. It also agrees with Odibo (2023), who reported that communication

significantly influences self-employment opportunities among business education graduates and recommended greater emphasis on communication skills for entrepreneurial careers.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the study concludes that ICT skills are generally needed by business education students for self-sustenance and national development. Computer operating, digital marketing, and communication skills all recorded cluster means within the 'Needed' category. These competencies can enhance students' ability to participate effectively in contemporary workplaces, undertake entrepreneurial activities, communicate with customers, market products and services, and utilize digital technologies for productive purposes. Strengthening the acquisition and practical application of ICT skills is therefore important to improving the employability and self-reliance of business education students.

Recommendations

1. Business education students should be sensitized to the importance of acquiring and continually updating relevant ICT skills so that they can compete effectively in emerging local and global markets.
2. Government and relevant educational authorities should provide tertiary institutions with adequate ICT facilities, internet access, and reliable electricity to support regular practical training.
3. Business education departments should organize regular practical workshops, seminars, and skills-development programmes for students in computer operations, digital marketing, online communication, and related emerging technologies.
4. Lecturers should participate in continuous professional development programmes to update their ICT knowledge and improve the practical delivery of ICT-related content.
5. Business education curricula should place greater emphasis on hands-on ICT applications that are directly connected with employment, entrepreneurship, digital marketing, and contemporary business practice.

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