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Office Employability Competencies Needed by Business Education Graduates for Effective Job Performance in Modern Organisations in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study was conducted to identify office employability competencies needed by business education graduates for effective job performance in business organizations in Nigeria. The study was a survey and was conducted by 134 Directors and Managers of parastatals and companies in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria as respondents. A 34 item structured questionnaire was used. Out of 132 copies of the questionnaire distributed, 118 were retrieved and used for data analysis. Mean-scores and

standard deviation were used in the analysis of data. The study revealed that amongst others that 10 of the core office employability competencies and 13 e-office employability competencies were accepted as critical to business education graduates. The study recommended amongst others cordial linkage between business education departments in tertiary institution and business organization to keep abreast of current technologies.

Introduction

One of the major concerns of employers of labour in this information age is the recruitment of employees with requisite employability competencies to fit into the various organization job vacancies and positions (Okoye, 2000). Hillage and Pollard (1998), noted that employability is all about work and the performance ability to be employed. It also refers to a person's performance capability of securing and maintaining an employment. In business education, employability not only depends on whether one is able to fulfill the paper requirements of specific jobs. It also connotes how one practically stands relative to others within a group of job seekers. In other words, employability describes the possession of the requisite job performance competencies by business education graduates. Gore (2005), noted that graduate employability depends on their performance assets in terms of the knowledge, skill and attitudes they possess; the way they can use and deploy those assets; the way they present them to employers and the context (e.g., personal circumstances and the labour market environment within which they seek for work). Furrier and Sels (2003) also noted that employability is perceived at individual levels as the continuously fulfilling, acquiring or creating of work through the optimal use of performance competencies.

Competence on the other hand, represents the ability to perform a given task or related series of tasks. It is an ensuring characteristics or abilities possessed by an individual that under normal conditions should result in acceptable or superior job performance (Spencer and Spencer, 1993). Competence in business education therefore, could be perceived as the fundamental knowledge, technical skills, abilities or performance expertise in business education. It is therefore a standardized performance requirement for business education graduates to properly fit into specific office jobs. Business education graduates' performance in a specific work environment and experience will depend on the extent to which they possess the requisite performance competencies (Spencer and Spencer, 1993).

Effective as used here implies producing the result that is wanted or intended, or producing successful effects. On the other hand, performance implies to do something or to carry out a piece of work, task, duty; it is to work or to function well (Hornby, 2003). Effective performance therefore, depicts producing the result that is wanted or desired in the course of doing something. Effective performance therefore, is the possession of the competence to perform. Thus, effective performance competencies comprise of integrated performance oriented capabilities, which consist of clusters of knowledge, or intelligence including the necessary psychomotor capabilities and attitudes (Burke, 1989). All these are required for carrying out tasks, solving problems and more generally, for effective functioning in a certain profession, position or role (Burke, 1989). Curtin, (2000) also noted that effective performance competence depicts aptitude, dexterity, expertise, talents and intelligence required by an individual to practice in a given discipline or discharge a given task or activity. Effective performance competency therefore describes the possession of those essential work traits or characteristics which need to be acquired by job seekers to enable one secure initial employment, maintain such employment, and function effectively.

Jones and George (2003) saw an organization as an entity, a business or industry, school, government ministry or department, social club, church, the civil service, or even non-governmental organizations (NGOs). These bodies are all composed of people. They all have definite purposes to achieve, and all have some type of structure that delimits and defines the behaviour of their members. As an entity, Jones and George (2003) further described an organization as a group of people bound together in a formal relationship to achieve common goal.

Statement of problems

These day graduates of all discipline roam the major streets of urban cities looking for non-existence white collar jobs. Often, they are equally seen in clusters parading the rural areas with extreme bitterness in search of jobs. Graduates and in fact all well meaning Nigerians are filled with extreme regrets considering the rate of unemployment situation today in our country. On the other hand, the educational system has continued to chun out graduates whose performance ability in employment is in heavy doubt. Experiences show that employers of labour have continued to prove this by rejecting most graduate job applicants during recruitment. Specifically, the

employability competences of most Nigerian graduates are relatively very low. Most graduates do not possess the requisite occupational skills or competences needed for effective performance in office occupations. Chigunta (2001) earlier noted in this regard that the Nigeria education system has failed to cope with the current trend and changes in equipping her graduates with the requisite competences needed for effective job performance virtually in all fields. Most of the competences possessed by Nigerian graduates are parallel to the desires of employers of labour. Thus, the Nigerian education system has over flooded the labour market with graduates who cannot face the competition in the labour market. In this realization, the problem of this study is: what are the office employability competences needed by business education graduates for effective job performance in modern offices.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to identify the office employability competences needed by business education graduates for effective job performance in modern office occupations. Specifically, the study sought to identify the core office occupation competences and the electronic office occupation competences needed by business education graduates for effective job performance in modern office occupations in Nigeria.

Research questions

1. What are the core office employability competences needed by business education graduate for effective job performance in offices?
2. What are the E-office employability competences needed by business education graduates for effective job performance?

Scope of the study

The study was carried out using top ministry officials (Directors and Permanent Secretaries) from selected government ministries and parastatals in two states in Nigeria.

Method

The descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. The descriptive survey involves a onetime observation of independent and non manipulative (Asika, 1991). In this type of research, data are usually in their natural setting

without interfering with them variables (Uzoagulu, 1998). Thus, a descriptive survey was best suitable for this study as it enabled the researchers to gather information from the identified population and analyze same as they exist.

The instrument for data collection in this study was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers after a careful determination of the focus of this study. The instrument contained 34 items to elicit information on the core office, and e-office competencies required by business education graduate for effective job performance in today's office. A total of 132 copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents. The instrument was carefully face validated by five experts in the field of business education. The aim here was to ensure the suitability of the items of the instrument to the purpose of the study. A total of 118 out of the 132 copies of the instrument distributed were retrieved and used for analysis in this study. The mean and the standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. In doing this, a cut-off point of 2.5 was used as a baseline score for acceptance or rejection of each of the items. Thus, any item with a mean score of 2.5 and above was considered as one of the core office and e-office competencies required by business education graduates for effective job performance in modern offices. Items rating below 2.5 were discarded and were not required by business education graduates.

Findings and Discussions

Table 1: Mean Responses of Respondents on core Office Employability

ITEMS	N	X	SD	DECISION
1. Ability to take note in shorthand and transcribe same	120	2.41	1.13	Rejected
2. Ability to present accounting information	120	3.38	0.74	Accepted
3. Ability to understand accounting information	120	3.44	0.65	Accepted
4. Inability to use accounting information	120	1.58	0.67	Rejected
5. Ability to determine format of office documents	120	3.28	0.76	Accepted
6. Ability to design formats of office documents	120	3.33	0.76	Accepted

7. Inability to determine appropriate filing system	120	1.68	0.72	Rejected
8. Ability to follow office protocols	120	3.38	0.71	Accepted
9. Incompetence in office administration procedure	120	1.55	0.67	Rejected
10. Competence in stock taking	120	3.49	0.50	Accepted
11. Competence in office records management	120	3.40	0.73	Accepted
12. Inability to prepare office reports	120	1.68	0.77	Rejected
13. Ability to take minutes of meeting	120	3.42	0.66	Accepted
14. competence in handling meeting procedures	120	3.45	0.67	Accepted
15. Competence in distributive activities	120	3.28	0.84	Accepted
16. Incompetence in office personnel administration	120	1.58	0.66	Rejected

Results of data analyzed in the Table 1 indicated the following competencies as the core office occupation competencies preferred by employers of business education graduates for effective job performance of business education graduates. These competencies include:; ability to present accounting information; ability to understand account information; ability to determine formats of office documents, ability to design formats of office documents; ability to follow office protocols; competence in stock taking; competence in office records management; ability to take minutes of meeting, competence in handling meeting procedures, and competence in distributive activities. Each of these competencies yielded mean response of 3.38; 3.44; 3.28; 3.33; 3.38; 3.49; 3.40; 3.42; 3.45; 3.28; respectively. These mean scores are above 2.5 which was used in this study as a bench mark score for acceptance or rejection of items. Thus, these items were accepted and regarded as most highly preferred core office occupation competencies needed by business education graduates for effective job performance in modern offices.

This implies that employers of labour require business education graduates to possess basic and essential core office competencies as pre-requisite not only for gainful employment in organizations, but also for effective performance of their jobs. Thus, Ogbonna (2007) had earlier reported from his assessment of competencies needed by business education graduates to sustain employment in a business centre that the possession of the ability to present and understand accounting information is critical for business education graduates to hold their employment in business centers. These findings are in agreement with the findings of the present study. On the contrary, Ogbonna (2007) further reported that ability to take notes in shorthand and transcribe same is not crucial for business education graduates employed in business centers.

The present study indicated that the ability to take notes in shorthand and transcribe same are most highly preferred by employers of business education graduates. Okafor (2005) equally repeated that business education graduates should be competent enough and should possess the ability to determine and design formats of office documents. They should also be able to observe and follow office protocols as well as be able to take stock (Okafor, 2005). These opinions are in alliance with the findings of the present study. Thus, the present study indicated that employers of labour prefer business education graduates who are capable of determining and designing office documents. Okafor (2005) stressed that this ability or competence will enable business education graduates to be able to handle important documents in information. Thus, the handling of mails, documents and information are integral functions of office administrators that cannot be compromised. Similarly, Richard and Rogers (2006) reported that the possession of the competence to take minutes, handle meeting procedures and also the ability to engage in distributive activities are critical for graduates of business education. These competencies are essential to enable them meet the challenges of logistic contacts that characterize. This opinion is in agreement with the findings of this study. Thus, the present study as well indicated the ability to take minutes of meeting and the competence in handling meeting procedures as vital competencies needed by business education graduates to function effectively in office occupations. Respondents also indicated that competencies in distributive activities should also be possessed by business education graduates for effective job performance.

It is crucial therefore that business education graduates realize the extent of competition in the labour market. This competition has in recent times triggered off new thoughts and new recruitment criteria among employers of labour. Since many graduates compete for few vacancies in few organizations, employers of labour therefore place much importance on the competencies expected of prospective job applicants for employment and optimum performance in the organization. Educators therefore, now keep eagle eyes on the trend and changes in employers' desires. Thus, Wetterman (2005) noted that the possession of core office occupation competencies among job applicants is vital because it could be a major source of strength and efficiency for organizations in the discharge of regular office routine functions.

On the other hand, the inability to use accounting information; inability to determine appropriate filing system; incompetence in office administration; inability to prepare official reports including the incompetence in office personnel administration were all rejected by employers of labour. These items recorded mean scores of 1.57, 1.64, 1.95, 1.96 and 2.03 respectively. Thus, they do not have effect on the performance of business education graduates.

Table 2: Mean Responses of Respondents on E-office Employability Competences

	ITEM	N	X	SD	Decision
1.	Ability to use computer input devices effectively	120	3.58	0.50	Accepted
2.	Ability to input data correctly in the system	120	3.56	0.50	Accepted
3.	Inability to edit data/documents in the computer system	120	1.52	0.99	Rejected
4.	Ability to format/ Reformat documents	120	3.38	0.72	Accepted
5.	Ability to create tables or columns	120	3.38	0.67	Accepted
6.	Incompetence in browsing the net	120	1.60	0.63	Rejected
7.	Ability to insert pictures or graphics into documents	120	3.23	0.87	Accepted

8.	Competence in the use of search engines	120	3.34	0.77	Accepted
9.	Incompetence in the use of electronic data security	120	1.64	0.70	Rejected
10.	Ability to print documents	120	3.50	0.50	Accepted
11.	Ability to scan documents using the scanner	120	3.21	0.87	Accepted
12.	Incompetence in the use of laminating machine	120	1.58	0.69	Rejected
13.	Ability to use the copier to enlarge or reduce text	120	3.25	0.84	Accepted
14.	Ability to send electronic mails	120	3.36	0.73	Accepted
15.	Inability to use the Face book	120	1.59	0.68	Rejected
16.	Ability to use the You tube	120	3.24	0.78	Accepted
17.	Competence in the use of bulletin board	120	3.37	0.72	Accepted
18.	Ability to use the facsimile machine	120	3.30	0.77	Accepted

Results of data analyzed in the Table 2 above indicated the following as the electronic office competencies preferred by employers of business education graduates. The competencies are:- the ability to use the computer devices effectively; ability to input data correctly in the system; ability to format or reformat documents; ability to create tables or columns; ability to insert pictures or graphs into documents; competence in the use of search engines; ability to print documents; ability to scan documents using the scanner; ability to use the copier to enlarge or reduce documents; ability to send electronic mails; ability to use the “YU” tube, competence in the use of bulletin boards and ability to use the facsimile machine.

Each of these items recorded mean ratings above 2.5 used in this study as the bench mark for acceptance or rejection of each of the items. Thus, the competencies listed above were accepted hence regarded as most highly preferred by employers of business education graduates for effective job performance. On the contrary, such items like inability to edit documents in the computer system; incompetence in browsing the net; incompetence in the use of electronic data security; incompetence in the use of laminating

machine; including the inability to use the face book were rejected. The rejection was shown as each of the items achieved mean ratings below 2.5 used as a bench mark for acceptance or rejection of items in this study. Thus, these items do not have any bearing in the performance and productivity of business education graduates in electronic offices.

These findings under-score the indication that employers of labour desire business education graduates to possess electronic soft skills or competencies as pre-conditions to function effectively in today's electronic offices. Thus, Locker (2000) noted that the language of electronic soft skills and competence is no longer new in the world of business. It is all about the acquisition of the skills of information and communication technology. The findings of this study are in alliance with that of Brown and Green (1992) who posit that high school leavers should possess the ability to use computer input devices effectively, ability to format, create tables or columns as well as the ability to process and send electronic mails. Similarly, Oduma (2009) noted that business education graduates should be conversant with Microsoft office buttons; they should be able to create new file documents, recall and open existing file documents; save and re-name file documents as well. These earlier findings are in consonance with the result of the present study.

While stressing on electronic office competencies for business education students, Ituma (2009) noted that business education graduates require varied electronic soft skill and packages including the ability to use the bulletin boards, the YU tube, the facsimile machine, the copier as well as the ability to use the scanner. Business education graduates require these competences to be able to cope with the electronic office skill challenges in business offices. Ituma further reported in line with the findings in this work that business education graduates should be competent in composing, delivering, retrieving mails. They should be able to browse or navigate through the net and make business contacts electronically. It is pertinent therefore, to point out here that it is the advancement in office information and communication technology that has spurred the ideas of electronic soft skills or competencies. Thus, today, the office information communication technology is fast becoming the life-wire of all viable organizations both at national and international levels; hence, the emphasis on business education graduates' acquisition of electronic office competencies.

If there are areas where graduates face challenges in search of employment, office technologies rate highest. There is virtually no vacancy in today's

modern offices that the knowledge of soft skills are not required. It is in the face of these challenges that emphasis is being placed on electronic competencies in this study. 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 revolves. Institutions of higher learning are today being challenged by the high demand and ever changing soft skill requirements expected of business education graduates. 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. The ever-changing advances in office information and communication technologies have resulted in the much emphasis placed on electronic competencies in this work.

Conclusion

Office competence among business education graduates is an essential ingredient for effective functioning in an organization. These days, employers of labour are keen on recruiting prospective employees who have the capability to function with minimum supervision. Business education graduates therefore, are challenged with this trend. Thus, the expectation is that they should be proficient in office skills as well as in the skills of office technology. Both the routine office skills and electronic office competencies are inter-dependent and can not exist in isolation. Both are essential for effective functioning in modern offices. Business education graduates who are weak in the acquisition, use and application of office competencies obviously lack employability competencies in modern organization

Recommendations

The acquisition of office competencies is a very vital area of business education that requires constant attention. To ensure this,

- (1) business educators should establish good rapport and relationship with employers of labour.
- (2) There should exist cordial linkage between business education and the industry. This industrial linkage will be targeted at ensuring that the programme of study keep abreast of current technologies as well as employability skills required in the world of work. The linkage should equally pave way for programmed tutorials by employers of labour to the benefit of business education students.

- (3) The students' industrial work experience scheme (SIWES) should equally be taken seriously. Students' postings for the SIWES should be to places where the environment will enable them acquire the needed office skills.

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