

Acquisition of E-Business Competencies for Enhancing Economics Education Students' Career Prospects

Oleabhiele, Eric, Oziegbe

Department of Agricultural and Vocational Education,
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State, Nigeria
Email: oleabhiele.eric@mouau.edu.ng

Abstract

The study was carried out to investigate the acquisition of electronic-business competencies for enhancing Economics education students' career prospects. The sample size of the study consists of 35 Economics educators from tertiary institutions. The study was guided by three research questions. The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire validated by three experts while the reliability of the instrument was determined using the test-retest method with a reliability index of 0.79. The mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The finding revealed that for the enhancement of Economics Education students' career prospects the students required the following e-business competencies; e-accounting, e-communication and e-banking. Thus, it was recommended among others that school management should encourage and motivate staff (Economics Educators) to attend conferences and workshop to enable them engage with their colleagues and exchange ideas on the current happening in the e-business world, curriculum content and methodologies as this will help to improve the quality of Economics education graduates and enhance their career prospects.

Keywords: Economics, Economics education, E-business, competencies, career prospects.

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*Corresponding author: oleabhiele.eric@mouau.edu.ng

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INTRODUCTION

The advent of Technology has revolutionized every sphere of life; industries, healthcare, communication, transportation, manufacturing, education, among others. It plays a crucial role in shaping societal progress, influencing economic development, shaping educational processes and contributing to globalization. Presently, education has gone beyond the conventional procedure in the inculcating of skills, values, and knowledge. According to Oleabhiele (2024), the main purpose of education is to equip individuals with knowledge, skills, attitudes and values desirable in the society. Therefore, for students to suit into the world of work, there is need to embrace the benefits of technology. Thus, the rationale to integrate technological skills into the teaching of Economics if not the product of the discipline would be able to fit into the labour market.

Education can be seen as a process of learning that has future benefits in building the capacity of the citizens for a meaningful engagement of the forces that shape socio-economic development (Etro, 2020). Therefore, education is a medium through which the society transmits skills, attitudes, competencies and behaviours to its younger ones, in order to provide a better life for the society and its members. One of the national education goals is principally the acquisition of appropriate skills and the development of mental, physical and social abilities and competencies as equipment for the individual to live in, and contribute to the development of the society (FRN, 2013). Thus, one of the educational programmes that can lead to the attainment of these goals of education in Nigeria is Economics Education.

Economics Education provides the foundation for an individual to be rationale in his/her choice and to allocation of resource based on need and not want (Oleabhie, 2024). It is a field of study which prepares its recipients with relevant competencies needed to be productive in the society. Economics Education programme strives to achieve these aims by preparing their students for the world of work either as employees or employers of labour (Omotayo, Kadiri & Jimoh, 2023). It provides training, experience, knowledge and skills which could enable their students achieve self-reliance after graduation. Similarly, Inegbedion, Njoku, Ekpenyong, Umoru and Liadi (2016) defined Economics Education as a course that prepares students for entry into and advancement in jobs within business world and it is equally important because it prepares students to handle their own and manage business affairs and to function intelligently as consumers and citizens in the world of work.

In the same vein, Ede, Oleabhie and Modebelu (2016) stipulated that the actual goals of Economics Education are to: prepare students for specific career with the requisite skills for job creation and entrepreneurship; and expose students with knowledge about the workings of the economy, including a good blend of computer technology, which incorporates Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This is a vital reason for emphasising the enhancement of Economics education programme for career prospect through e-business.

E-business, according to Ayeni and Olatona as cited in Nwokike and Ugwunwoti (2020) is the sales and purchases of goods and services conducted over computer networks by methods specifically designed for the purpose of receiving or placing orders. E-business is the art of buying and selling goods and services via the internet. It could also be referred to as the buying and selling of goods and services, servicing customers, processing, making payments, managing production control, collaborating with business partners, sharing information and running automated services. The benefits of e-business are numerous and cannot be overemphasized. it offers a variety of products as obtainable in conventional markets; provides one the opportunity to use point of sales (POS) and automated teller machines (ATM), reduces the stress of going to and queuing in banks, enhances quick service delivery, reduction in the risk of carrying about bulk money and sometimes accidents and makes transactions pleasurable. In the use of new technologies in managing businesses, competence is a core issue, because it enables employees to transform ideas into business values and in the end, higher productivity. E-businesses are web-based technology that requires some levels of competencies in applying it in managing current realities in businesses.

Competencies are abilities of power and authority of knowledge, attitudes and facts necessary for accomplishing tasks (Sardana & Bajpai, 2020). Competencies, therefore, are the knowledge, skills and behaviours that enable an employee to meet established performance criteria. Etim, James, Arikpo and Okeowo (2021) view competencies as essential knowledge and skills obtainable in a profession and those which the professionals in the field must possess and be able to demonstrate at optimal level of acquisition and functioning. Quality service or job can only be rendered when one has the knowledge, competencies and attitude required in the profession.

Competencies are skills, abilities, attitudes and behaviours acquired and exhibited after an exposure to theories and practices in an individual's field of endeavour/study, (Nwalado, 2021). Competencies are a set of skills combined with knowledge and abilities. In the context of this paper, the term competencies refer to the minimum skills required of individuals who have participated in a course of programme in Economics Education. The graduate of Economics Education programme is expected to be knowledgeable in the three domains of learning as explained by Ehiametalor (2019) namely; Cognitive- sort out information, interpretation of data, motivation. Psychomotor: Applications in the utilization of machines,

arrangement of data to a format. Affective: communication effect, appreciation of the effort of other people's work performance, appreciation of one's effort in group goal achievement.

In the cognitive domain, Economics Education graduates who would be required to act as executive officer in the civil services and private companies or as teachers must have a good grasp of the theoretical foundation of the subject matter. Omowumi in Saleh (2020) opined that there is, the 'mental' cognitive exercise of sorting out information into meaningful things which is a necessary competence required for sorting transactions into different classes of accounts such as personal, impersonal, real, and nominal expenses. It is in the cognitive domain that competencies such as interpretation of data with the use of equations, ratios, percentages and so on are required.

In the psychomotor domain, Economics Education graduates must develop the competence of using their hands and brain to perform in the teaching and clerical functions. Competencies such as ability to manipulate calculators, franking machines, and computers are required in the business world. There are e-business competencies required of Economics Education students to manage business and these competencies according to Saleh (2020) include; e-accounting skill, e-communication, and e-banking skill, among others.

E-accounting competencies deals with the ability to: use sage accounting, use microsoft excel, use loan amortization application, use digital web links, use payable and purchases application, use application for preparing profit and loss account, use application for preparing statement of affairs account. Accounting competencies are capabilities which include knowledge, professional values, ethics and attitudes to perform accounting and other tasks required (Emeh, Ahaiwe, & Okoro, 2019).

The e-accounting competencies use ICT application tools in gathering, recording, analyzing, processing, interpreting and communicating financial transactions to enable stakeholders make quick and rightful decisions and even detect frauds where necessary.

Another important competence skill required by Economics education students is the e-communication skill. In this digital era, one area of e-communication competencies needed for the management of business according to Ololube in Shabi and Adekoya (2023), is in the application of telecommunication facilities to teach Economics Education courses. This involves the use of graphical, audio and audio-visual telecommunication devices such as projectors, fax, telex, mobile phones, teleconferencing, radio, television among others. Anissimov in Shabi and Adekoya (2023) also noted that another e-communication competency which is required in managing businesses is multimedia competencies which involves the process of combining basic types of media (video, sound, graphic and animation) into the learning environment in a way that a powerful classroom experience is created. The Economics educator must be versed in the use of such multimedia facilities such as video-conferencing, projectors, interactive whiteboards, DVD, slides among others with the internet playing a vital role. Ayiri and Kudzanayi (2017) described the internet as intercontinental spider web that enables millions of people from around the world to download millions of files consisting of reports, research, graphics, and millions of people to send and receive information around the world within a second. The internet is an inter connectivity of computers via email to share data and computing resources by researchers, corporate bodies, academics and individuals. In addition, the Internet therefore, is an internal network of computers linked up to exchange information. Ayiri and Kudzanayi (2017) further posited that internet is a large set of computer networks that communicate with each other, often over telephone lines, it enables companies, organizations, individuals, schools and governments to share information across the world.

According to Shabi and Adekoya (2023), internet provides the opportunity for users (organizations, schools and individuals) to communicate and share knowledge. The internet tools include search engines, electronic mail, networking, social-networking sites, online videos/YouTube among others. The search engines (Google, yahoo, Chrome, Edge, Bing among others) are designed for searching information from the world wide web through crawling, indexing and searching activities and the results are presented on the search engine results page. They operate by storing information about many web pages retrieved from hypertext markup language (HTML) by the crawler or spider (an automated web browser that follows every link on the site) which are analyzed and indexed according to titles, page contents or special fields in the index database for later queries.

The acquisition of e-communication competencies, accompany with that of e-banking can effectively enhance Economics education students career prospect in the business world. Electronic banking (e-banking) can be defined as the use of electronic delivery channels for banking products and services. Chinazor (2021) defined electronic banking as remote banking services provided by the authorized banks, or their representatives through devices operated either under the bank's direct control or management or under the outsourcing agreement. In other words, e-banking is an umbrella term for the process by which a customer may perform banking transactions electronically without visiting a branch and also includes the systems that enable customers of banks, individuals or businesses, to access accounts, transact business, or obtain information on financial products and services through a public or private network, including the Internet.

Modern technological devices according to Nwokike and Ugwunwoti (2020), used in the bank include Automated teller machine (ATM) which can be used to transfer money from one account to another, pay bills and check balance. E-banking software allows loans to be approved within a space of time. The authors observed that new auto-writing cheques can be used in writing cheques instead of using pen. Therefore, new technologies of banking industries include but not limited to the following: Automated teller machine (ATM). Point of sale (POS), Mobile Banking or banking on wheels, Cash Card, pay direct, telephone banking, internet banking. Electronic fund transfer, master cards. Alerts and auto writing cheques. Similarly, Saprikis and Vlachopoulou (2015) stated that the benefits of e-banking include the following: automation of financial services by banks has improve customer satisfaction, reduced congestion of banking halls, introduction of e-banking with these companies and individuals find it easy to transact at their convenience, reducing congestion in banking halls, payment of electricity bills, taxes, flight bookings, time saving, lowers transactional fees, reduces cost of operation of the banks and subsequently leads to more profit, customers also do all the work themselves, so staff numbers can be reduced. Overhead costs (heating and lighting, insurance, salaries) are greatly reduced, encourages healthy competition and creativity which in turn leads to the development of the industry, enormous amount of money is made from online transactions such as forex trading, online mini-importation, buying and selling of crypto currencies. E-banking also facilitates delivery of reliable services as the automation of most financial services reduces the risk of errors.

From the foregoing, it is important for Economics educators to intensify the teaching of e-accounting, e-communication, e-banking competencies in order to enhance Economics Education graduates career prospect in the world of work. It is therefore expected that Economics Education students upon graduation should be able to venture into business activities and thrive successfully, instead of being unemployed or waiting for white collar jobs that are not readily available. It is against this backdrop that it becomes imperative to conduct this study enhancing Economics Education students' career competencies through the acquisition of e-business skills.

Purpose of the study

This study is focused on the acquisition of e-business competencies for enhancing Economics Education students' career prospects. Specifically, the study determined the:

1. e-accounting competencies required by Economics Education students in enhancing their career prospects
2. e-communication competencies required by Economics Education students in enhancing their career prospects
3. e-banking competencies required by Economics Education students in enhancing their career prospects

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. what are the e-accounting competencies required by Economics Education students enhances their career prospects?
2. what are the e-communication competencies required by Economics Education students enhances their career prospects?
3. what are the e-banking competencies required by Economics Education students enhances their career prospects?

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. According to Nworgu (2016) descriptive survey research design involves the collection of opinions, attitudes or feelings of a population or its representative sample using questionnaire or interview to explain existing phenomenon. Descriptive survey research design is considered most appropriate for the study as the focus of this study is to obtain the opinions of Economics Educators on assessment of electronic business competencies required by Economics Education students for their career prospects.

A census sample of 35 Economics educators in universities in South-East, Nigeria was used for the study. The choice of this category of respondents was because they have vast knowledge about the e-business competencies required of Economics Education students. The instrument for data collection was 24-item structured questionnaire developed by the researcher titled: "E-Business Competencies of Economics Education Students Questionnaire (EBCEESQ)". The instrument was divided into two parts (part one and two). Part, one sought for information on the background of the respondents. Part two comprised of two clusters (A and B). Each cluster contained item statement based on the research questions and structured on a four-point scale of Highly Required (HR), moderately Required (MR), Rarely Required (RR) and Not Required (NR) with corresponding values of 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The instrument was subjected to face validation by three experts: one from the Measurement and Evaluation unit of the Department of Science Education and two from Economics Education, Department of Agricultural and Vocational Education all in College of Education Michael Okpara University of Agriculture Umudike. The observations and suggestions of the experts were put into consideration in the final draft of the instrument used for data collection.

The reliability of the instrument was established through test-re-test method. The instrument was administered to the respondents twice at an interval of two weeks. This was to establish the stability of the instrument. In order to ascertain the stability, the data collected from the first and second administration were collated and subjected to analysis using the Pearson Product Moment correlation statistics which yielded a reliability coefficient of .79.

The data collected from the study was analyzed using mean for answering the research questions and standard deviation to determine the spread of the respondents from the mean in their responses and t-test was used to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. In decision making, any item whose mean is 2.50 or above was accepted as required while any item rating below 2.50 was regarded as not required.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: what are the e-accounting competencies required by Economics Education students in enhancing their career prospects?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation of the e-accounting competencies required by Economics Education students in enhancing their career

S/N	Items Statement	X	SD	Remarks
1.	Ability to understand the basic principles of electronic accounting.	3.51	0.67	Required
2.	Ability to generate and analyze electronic financial report.	3.47	0.54	Required
3.	Ability to analyze electronic tools for financial planning.	3.51	0.56	Required
4.	Competency in managing electronic payroll processes.	2.58	0.81	Required
5.	Ability to use mobile applications for accounting tasks.	3.45	0.62	Required
6.	Proficiency in customizing electronic charts of accounts for specific business needs.	2.88	0.74	Required
7.	Ability to navigate and use advance features in electronic accounting software	2.34	0.82	Not Required
8.	Skills in implementing electronic accounting for small scale businesses.	3.67	0.63	Required
9.	Ability to understand electronic forecasting.	3.78	0.56	Required
10.	Ability to adapt to updates in electronic accounting software.	3.65	0.61	Required
11.	Ability to use online accounting to generate sales leads.	3.11	0.51	Required

Data in Table 1 show that the 10 item statements had their mean ranged from 2.58 to 3.78 which is above the cut off mark of 2.50 indicating that electronic accounting competencies required by Economics Education students for the enhancement of their career prospects with the exemption of item 7, which is on the ability to navigate and use advance features in electronic accounting software with a mean score of 2.34 which falls below the cut off of 2.50 was not required by Economics Education students for the enhancement of their career prospects. However, with the standard deviation values ranging from 0.51 to 0.81, implies that there is homogeneity in agreement among the respondents on electronic accounting competencies required by Economic Education students in enhancing their career prospects

Research Question 2: what are the e-communication competencies required by Economics Education students in enhancing their career prospects?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation e-communication competencies required by Economics Education students in enhancing their career prospects

S/N	Items Statement	X	SD	Remarks
1.	Ability to read wide range of publications online	3.57	0.76	Required
2.	Ability to effectively communicate with customers using electronic communication	3.87	0.67	Required
3.	Ability to manage electronic communication during non-working hours	3.45	0.59	Remarks

4.	Ability to download information from the web for business transactions	3.33	0.73	Required
5.	Ability to retrieve email with attachment to customers	3.45	0.61	Required
6.	Ability to display teleconferencing skills in promoting business communication with customers	3.61	0.63	Remarks
7.	Skills in the usage of internet services transaction	3.86	0.71	Required
8.	Ability to maintain professionalism in virtual presentations	3.21	0.83	Required
9.	Assessing overall adaptability to emerging trends and technologies in electronic communication.	3.24	0.73	Remarks
10.	Ability to convey complex information clearly through written electronic communication.	3.62	0.60	Required
11.	Competency in composing and sending of emails	3.79	0.54	Required

Data in Table 2 showed that the 11 item statements had their mean ranged from 3.21 to 3.87 which is above the cut off mark of 2.50 indicating that all items statement are communication competencies required by Economics Education students the enhancement of their career prospects. However, with the standard deviation values ranging from 0.54 to 0.83, implies that there is homogeneity in agreement among the respondents on the communication ccompetencies required by Economics Education students for the enhancement of their career prospects

Research Question 3: What are the e-banking competencies required by Economics Education students for the enhancing of their career prospects?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation of the e-banking competencies required by Economics Education students for the enhancing of their career prospects

S/N	Items Statement For E- Banking Competencies	X	SD	Remark
1.	Ability to manage multiple accounts seamlessly through electronic banking.	3.44	0.65	Required
2.	Ability to manage electronic fund transfers between accounts.	3.72	0.54	Required
3.	Ability to use online account organization in banking business	3.09	1.02	Required
4.	Ability to use Point of Sale Terminal (POS) for banking activities	3.23	0.61	Required
5.	Ability to utilize electronic alerts for bank notifications.	3.33	0.69	Required
6.	Ability to use alerts and auto writing cheques for customers	3.21	0.74	Required
7.	Ability to use credit cards to make transactions	3.76	0.65	Required
8.	Ability to protect password to accounts	3.65	0.64	Required
9.	Ability to have quick and continuous access to banking information at the click of a button	3.12	0.78	Required
10.	Ability to be efficient in cash management electronically.	3.65	0.52	Required

The data in Table 3 showed that ten electronic banking competences items had a mean score of ranging from 3.09 to 3.76. All these items had their mean values above the cut off mean value of 2.50 which implied that all the ten electronic banking competences items were required by Economics education students for the enhancement of their career prospects. Similarly, their standard deviation values ranged from 0.52 to 1.02, implies that the respondents are in agreement that all the items on electronic banking competencies are required by Economics Education students for management of the enhancement of their career prospects.

Discussion of the Findings

The discussion of the findings of the study was carried out based on the research questions and hypotheses formulated for the study;

The findings revealed that Economics Education students in universities required electronic accounting competencies for the enhancement of their career prospects. Supporting the finding, Saprikis, and Vlachopoulou (2015) concurred that e-accounting provides the avenue to found out the detection of missing vouchers, automation of video recording and posting of financial transactions among others. The study equally revealed that electronic ordering of payment, ability to utilized Microsoft excel package among others are the e-accounting skills needed by Economics education student for the enhancement of their career prospects. in this digital era. In addition, the finding was not in consonance with finding of Saleh (2020) which indicated that Economics education need the e-accounting for the preparation of final account of firms and other establishment where financial reports need to be made.

The findings revealed that Economics Education students required electronic communication competencies for the enhancement of their career prospects. The finding of the study is in line with the finding of Shabi and Adekoya (2023) which averred that e-communication competencies are needed for the enhancement of their career prospects as well as for the management of small-scale business which are characterised with the use of graphical, audio and audio-visual telecommunication tools like fax, telex, mobile phones, teleconferencing, radio, television among others. More so, Olalade and Ogbeide (2017) agreed that e-communication competencies which is required in the enhancement of their career prospects involves the process of combining basic types of media (video, sound, graphic and animation) into the business environment.

The result in research question three revealed that Economics Education students required electronic banking competencies for the enhancement of their career prospects and management of small-scale businesses. The finding is in agreement with finding of Sardana and Bajpai (2020) which revealed that internet accessibility has significant effect on small and medium enterprise expansion of income base in Enugu metropolis, because internet accessibility enables the conduct of banking business over the internet where costs are minimal. Furthermore, the finding is in line with that of Waral (2021) asserted that, e-banking is an umbrella term for the process by which a customer may perform banking transactions electronically without visiting a branch and also includes the systems that enable customers of banks, individuals or businesses, to access accounts, transact business, or obtain information on financial products and services through a public or private network, including the Internet

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the study assessed the e-business competencies required of Economics Education students in the enhancement of their career prospects. Therefore, it is expected that students of Economics education are exposed to these e-business competencies to brighter their job prospects in this era of digitalisation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made:

1. Economics Educators should ensure that students are assigned to firms and industries that provide students with cognate experiences during their Students Industrial Work Experience Scheme

2. School management should encourage and motivate staff (Economics Educators) to attend conferences and workshop to enable them engage with the colleagues and exchange ideas on the current happening in the e-business world, curriculum content and methodologies as this will help to improve the quality of Economics education graduates
3. The issue of power supply should be given priority for both staff and students to access the internet and follow up on happenings in the e-Business environment.

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