



## INTEGRATING DIGITAL SKILLS IN BUSINESS EDUCATION CURRICULUM FOR EMPLOYMENT GENERATION AS ANTIDOTE TO CURB ‘JAPA’ SYNDROME IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

Japa’ is a syndrome and recent phenomenon currently ravaging the county, especially most common among the active population otherwise referred to as youths which has taking its toll on every aspect of the Nigerian socio-economic sector and education with business education not an exception. Business education programme across all sectors of the Nigerian educational system (primary, secondary and tertiary levels) has equally suffered brain drain problem occasioned by this Japa syndrome leading to a significant loss of talent and human capital which further portends danger for the already threatened Nigerian business environment and economic development reality. Curriculum which is the vehicle through which laid down educational philosophy of a nation is translated into concrete reality must contain the prescribed course of studies to be inculcated in the students in order to reach a certain level of education for the purpose of economic development. In order for business education to fulfill its mandate at this 21<sup>st</sup> century; especially for the purpose of employment creation to curb Japa syndrome, it is therefore imperative for its curriculum to be integrated with the responsibility of unveiling the dynamics of the world of work to ensure that its recipients possess relevant digital skills needed for effective entry and efficient participation in economic development. This study therefore discusses the integration of digital skills in business education curriculum for employment generation as antidote to curb ‘Japa’ syndrome in Nigeria. The paper concludes that it is of great importance to possess skills in digitalization, especially business education curriculum to be able to function efficiently and effectively in a digital world to fill the skill gap; generate employment and curb the ‘Japa’ syndrome as opportunities people are struggling for to migrate to other greener pastures would be readily available in Nigeria for socio-economic development and satisfaction.

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**Keywords: business education, curriculum, digital skills, employment generation, japa syndrome**

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### Introduction

Youth migration has become very popular in Nigeria shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic to the extent that it has become a new normal and christened as ‘Japa’ which refers to the act of Nigerian youths migrating outside the shores of the country in search of better opportunities. The factors adduced to this syndrome include the unabated socio-economic and political crises shortcomings at home; quest for good educational aspirations; search for greener pastures; insecurity; corruption; and general life frustration occasioned by inadequate infrastructure, educational curriculum deficiencies and hydra-headed unemployment. These are also responsible for the mismatch between educational outcomes and labour market demands. ‘Japa’ syndrome is a phenomenon that has taking its toll on every aspect of the Nigerian socio-economic sector and education with business education not an exception. Business education programme across all sectors of the Nigerian educational system (primary, secondary and tertiary levels)

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has equally suffered brain drain problem and a significant loss of talent and human capital which further portends danger for Nigerian business environment and economic development reality.

Studies assessing the quality of business education programme, especially at the secondary education sub-sector in Nigeria highlight issues such as outdated curricula and limited access to educational resources. These factors contribute to low academic performance in business education subjects; especially in external examinations as evident in the 2024 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) results (WAEC Chief Examiner Report, 2024). In the light of these concerns, a prospective analysis of business education curriculum is imperative to assess the current curriculum and explore innovative strategies and interventions that can rejig this aspect of vocational education. Curriculum as the vehicle through which laid down educational philosophy of a nation is translated into concrete reality must contain the prescribed course of studies which students must learn in order to reach a certain level of education; hence, it is an orderly collection of obligatory, essential and vital subjects included in a specific course programme for studies in a school, college or university. It is however observed as reported by Oguejiofor (2020), that curriculum offerings at the secondary levels do not cater for some of the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills for global performance in business and the world of work. This was corroborated by Ikpesu (2017) who stated that business education curriculum in Nigeria is at variance with global digital world. This variance however, seems to portray a total disconnection between the preparation at the secondary education level; what higher education offers and the needs of the labour market. The challenge here lies on how to ensure that the curriculum and delivery system provide satisfactory output that can compete globally in the labour market.

### **An Overview of Business Education**

Business education programme according to Ezenwafor and Onokpaunu (2017) is a branch of vocational education concerned with exposing its recipients to internal and external foundations and functioning of the workplace. Business education is a work-focused, skilled-based, result-oriented and technology-based educational programme. With the knowledge of business education, students are better informed and groomed with skills and understanding to cope with the unpredictable challenges of the business environment. It is imperative for business education programme which is charged with the responsibility of unveiling the dynamics of the world of work to ensure that its recipients possess relevant digital skills needed for effective entry and efficient participation in economic development. Okeji et al (2020) in support of the above stated that the value of any education programme could be determined by its ability to adequately prepare and equip individuals in such a manner that they could fit into specific jobs, become technologically relevant, internationally competitive and economically prosperous, if properly packaged and adequately delivered. However, the reliable medium through which the mission and vision of business education programmes can be achieved stems from effective review and implementation of its curriculum. In order to achieve this, there is need for the integration of digital skills in the business education curriculum. In business education, digital skills extend to all aspects of teaching and learning, and help students to acquire basic digital skills and knowledge.

Business educators and teachers need to incorporate strategies for providing technical, managerial, personal and social skills to create digital citizens (people who use digital technology purposefully and confidently to communicate, find information and purchase goods/services); digital workers (people who have the ability to evaluate, configure and use complex digital systems and digital makers (people with skills to build digital technology - typically software development). Business educators should strive to



adopt different electronic means for the development of digital skills or tools for education and job market in the teaching and learning environment. The idea is to fulfill the needs of students and teachers and made them aware of all digital tools that are crucial for learning and ensure growth in the digital age. Digital skills would enable graduates of business education at any level to create; share digital content; communicate; collaborate and solve problems for effective and creative self-fulfillment in life, learning, work and social activities at large. In business education, it is imperative to use digital technologies to transform existing traditional and non-digital curriculum processes and educational programmes or creating new ones, to meet evolving job market and customer expectations, especially in small and medium scales entrepreneurship programmes.

### **What are Digital Skills?**

Digital skills are defined as the ability to find, evaluate, use, share, and create content using digital devices, such as computers and smartphones. These days, the digital skills required in the workplace are a bit more advanced, and organizations expect the vast majority of their employees to have them, not just a select few. No doubt, technology is now at the center of our lives, and as our dependence on the internet and digital communications increases, our workforce must keep up with the evolving skill demand. Digital skills according to UNESCO (2020) are ‘a range of abilities to use digital devices, communication applications, and networks to access and manage information. They enable people to create and share digital content, communicate, collaborate and solve problems for effective and creative self-fulfillment in life, learning, work, and social activities.’ Students that learn digital skills not only make themselves more employable but future-proof their career by understanding key digital channels and useful artificial intelligence tools. Okeji, Nwankwo, Anene and Olorunfemi (2020) viewed digital skills as a set of skills that enables individuals to effectively and efficiently perform tasks using new technologies in the digital environment. Today, digital skills required for employability are many, more advanced and employers expect graduate of tertiary institutions across all discipline with business education inclusive to possess vast majority of them, not just a selected few. Digital skills include cognitive and physical abilities, content and processing skills, social system and complex problem-solving skills, resource management skills and technical skills (World Economic Forum, 2018). The International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2018) defined digital skills as a set of technological abilities that may be fully or partially acquired before entering the world of work. In the context of this study, digital skills are the abilities of using digital technologies to transform existing traditional and non-digital business process and services, or creating new ones, to meet evolving market and customer expectations.

Alyoubi (2015) noted that students need digital skills for effective participation in the development of digital economy. The World Economic Forum (2018) equally reported that digital skills are required for the development of every sector of economy (such as health, agriculture, finance, transportation, education, tourism, construction, information and communication technology industries among others). The ITU (2020) in support of the above stated that digital skills are highly required to participate in the labour market and recommended that digital skills should be embedded in education and training to enable individuals to participate fully in modern digital economy, whether as technology specialist, leaders of digital enabled businesses or workers in digitally-enabled jobs across the economy. Okoye (2017) therefore, corroborates this by stating that basic ICT skills should be embedded into business education curriculum in higher institutions in order to prepare students for global work competition.



Ajisafe, et al (2024) opined that, it is therefore required by every employer of labour that products of all educational programmes possess digital skills; which necessitated its inclusion in the curriculum of business education programmes across all the tiers of Nigerian tertiary education, especially, but most importantly; the curriculum of business education at the university sector. This was attested to as the revised university curriculum referred to as the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards for the Nigerian University Systems (CCMAS) (Federal Government of Nigeria, FGN, 2023) provides specifically that, business education would afford its students the opportunity to learn and develop 21st Century skills that will enable them to fit into and take up contemporary business opportunities, employment opportunities and be self-employed or employers of labour. These skills include the following, among others, team work skills; digital literacy skills; creative and innovative skills; information literacy skills; media literacy skills; digital citizenship skills; flexibility skills; multitasking skills and critical thinking skills (FGN, 2023).

### **Digital Skills Needed in Business Education Curriculum for Employment Generation to Curb ‘Japa’ Syndrome**

Digital transformation is on the rise and affecting every industry unimaginably. Farmers are no longer merely sowing seeds and harvesting a crop; they’re using sensors and information technology to automate, monitor, and regulate their systems to become more profitable, efficient, and sustainable. Food delivery apps now help restaurants provide their menu options to hungry patrons without them having to leave their homes. This adds a complex layer of responsibilities for restaurant workers who now must manage orders through digital devices, as well as any in-person interactions. Even real estate, a traditionally face-to-face industry, relies on digital skills. Virtual walk-throughs are available to prospects looking to relocate, and signing documents remotely with services like DocuSign which is a quick and convenient way to finalize an agreement. The mass shift to online business operations in recent years further accelerated the need for digitally literate workers who could help traditional businesses successfully transition to and grow in an e-commerce world. Without a firm command of digital skills, there is no way to propel innovation and remain competitive. Employers realize this, so they’re prioritizing candidates who can showcase their digital literacy. It is therefore imperative for products of business education in order not to be left behind to fully evolve with better digital skills, as only employees with these all-important skills required to operate in this century have a chance to contribute to their communities, future-proof their careers, and explore a wide range of professional opportunities. Some of the digital skills required include, but not limited to the following:

**Social Media:** the ability to understand and use social media effectively is a core and valued skill that every business educator should have. Social media marketing goes beyond posting a Facebook or LinkedIn update; it is about understanding the dynamic relationship between brands, influencers, and consumers. Simply put, businesses need to reach out to customers in ways that will drive traffic to their website, or product for potential conversion. It now also plays a key role in providing good customer service and a positive customer experience as many consumers take to social media to ask questions or make comments. Business education products who recognize social media’s influence should understand the intricacies of each platform, from YouTube to TikTok marketing and the potential of social media to maximize community engagement to provide graduates with valuable and applicable skills.



**Search Engine Marketing (SEM):** beyond social media, Search Engine Marketing (SEM) is one of the most influential disciplines that marketers have come to rely on. Business education students with SEM experience can increase the visibility of a company’s website on a search engine (e.g., Google or Bing) primarily via paid advertising. By doing so, the business will attract valuable web traffic from the search engine results page. By using SEM, students will be able to capture precious organic search traffic results. That’s why marketers, content managers and webmasters spend a great deal of time optimizing websites, and ad campaigns to ensure the highest conversion rates possible as it has been said that *by the end of 2024, 21% of total retail sales will happen online.*

**Data Analytics:** data can make or break a business. It’s not only about quality over quantity but also how that data is analyzed to gain insights. There are now multiple channels where marketers can track data, from social media to websites to paid media, all these data sets create a picture and 360-degree view of customers. So, businesses are looking for marketers with hands-on digital analytics experience to help drive growth. Peter Drucker (1999) a leader in management education and often described as the founder of modern management once said, “if you can't measure it, you can't manage it.” Data analytics essentially allow students to make educated and data-driven decisions to drive better business insights. Companies don’t want to waste valuable marketing money based on trends or gut instincts. It’s about maximizing each advertising campaign’s effectiveness and optimizing the return on investment.

**Content Marketing:** content comes in many forms – blog posts, videos, podcasts, infographics, and even social media status updates. Marketers may spend their time optimizing keywords and advertising campaigns, but content is still king. After all, a website or social media page is driven by its content and without it; customers have no way of understanding the benefits of a product or service. Content is crucial in driving brand awareness and can establish brands or influencers as thought leaders. Therefore, new hires need to understand the importance of creating not just content, but content that is relevant to keyword research and optimizing them in a strategy. With experience and knowledge in content marketing, business education students will have a valuable and employable skills that will set them up for a career in any industry.

**Email Marketing:** one of the best ways to get and retain leads is via a tried and tested method through email marketing. Email is one of the oldest forms of direct marketing and still packs a punch in customer acquisition and retention. From startups to multinational corporations, a great email marketing strategy helps launch successful campaigns. An experienced digital marketer knows that each stage of the funnel has to be carefully planned. From the signup page—including its placement on a website to the welcome email, every step needs to be optimized to attract users and build engagement. People may change social media accounts or home addresses, but people aren’t prone to change their email addresses. That’s why professionals who understand the power of email marketing to connect directly with consumers are in high demand. Business educators should not see email as an old-fashioned tool but challenge students to rethink ways to use email in their roles - current and future.

**Mobile Marketing:** with billions of people across the globe using mobiles to research, communicate and purchase, optimizing content and landing pages for smartphones should be something every business does. It has been predicted that by the end of year 2024; mobile ad spending will account for 66% of total digital ad spend and mobile apps will generate 82% of that mobile ad spend. In addition, generative AI will continue to disrupt and transform search and virtual assistants. Along with optimizing content for



mobiles, businesses would also be looking at voice searches. Hence, business education programme must inculcate all these skills needed in the new digital economy to curtail the further drift of the productive youth population from looking for greener pastures in possession of these skills through “japa” syndrome.

**Strategy & Planning:** businesses that use a digital marketing campaign strategy are more likely to see measurable results in the long term. Instead of planning on an ad-hoc basis, digital marketers now create and implement campaigns based on analytics and quantifiable SEO data. For example, setting specific KPIs and identifying methods for measuring each indicator now help a marketer remain accountable. It’s also imperative that they analyze past campaigns and decide which metric is worth measuring. Business educators should take advantage of this skills gap, by teaching students how to plan and execute a digital strategy.

**Social Selling:** sales professionals now connect with and influence customers in areas where their prospects are online. Social selling is proving its worth for sellers that use it as the majority of business enterprises now rely on it for filling their pipelines and it generates half of the revenue for major industries. Businesses are also beginning to understand the importance of social selling by investing in new 'sales stack' technology such as email tracking tools, productivity apps, and sales intelligence software. Above all, social selling tools are seen as very effective in connecting with the modern buyer, one that relies on social platforms for reviews and advice. As a relatively new arena for organizations, offering training that is industry-aligned will help any student interested in a sales career and achieving social selling success.

**Video:** Video has evolved from being just a form of entertainment to a major social media content driver. YouTube is now a powerful and influential platform while networks like TikTok and Instagram have turned video on its head to create wealthy influencers. Why is video so popular? With smartphone users becoming stronger and the mainstay of communication, social media apps like WhatsApp, Weibo, and WeChat are becoming the de-facto tools of instant message communication. WhatsApp has more than 2 billion users worldwide with most downloads being from the United States. Video as content is easier to consume than other formats e.g., a blog post. It’s also more entertaining and appeals to myriads of users, irrespective of age. By combining the emotional power of social media video with the reach and scope of digital advertising, markets can tap into a growing market of engaged consumers.

It is pertinent to note that when a business educator's product stands out in the modern workplace, there is an opportunity for such employees to improve their chances of excelling in their chosen career. Whichever career path a business educator chooses, he/she should keep in mind that there are always new skills to learn and new technologies to master. However, for entry-level positions, the bare minimum digital skills required include the ability to carry out tasks, such as:

- communicating via email
- researching information online
- handling sensitive information in virtual ecosystems
- safely using cloud-based collaboration tools like Google Drive, DropBox, and Microsoft Teams
- creating and managing spreadsheets and online documents
- basic device management like connecting to the internet or installing software updates
- screen sharing during a video call



- using online calendars and efficiently managing your schedule (and possibly others on the team)

### Conclusion

Digital technology as electronic tools, systems, devices and resources would assist students of business education programme to generate, store or process data, using resources such as video conferencing, GPS, 5G and Virtual Reality, Cloud Technology, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Block Chain Technology and mobile phones among others. It is therefore of great importance to possess skills in digitalization, especially in business education curriculum to be able to function efficiently and effectively in a digital world. This would definitely fill the skill gap; generate employment and curb the 'Japa' syndrome as opportunities for people who are struggling to migrate would be readily available in Nigeria for socio-economic development and satisfaction.

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