



Employability Skills Acquired and on Inclusive Workforce Integration of Business Education Students in Universities in South-South

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Abstract

This study examined employability skills acquired and inclusive workforce integration of Business education students in Universities in South-South, Nigeria. The study adopted three purpose of study and three research questions as guide. The research employed a survey design, gathering data from 1496 Business Education final year students across Universities in South-South. Adopting the Taro Yamen formula, the sample size for the study was 316 Business education final year students of 2024/2025 academic session. A structured questionnaire titled "Assessment of Employability Skills Acquired Through Business Education and Their Influence on Inclusive Workforce Integration Questionnaire" (AESATBEIIWIQ) was used for data collection. The questionnaire was face and content validated by three lecturers form Business education and one from Measurement and evaluation all in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education. Out of the 316 copies distributed, 303 were retrieved which account for 87% of the instrument collected. The questionnaire was structured on a four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and strongly disagree (SD). A reliability index of 0.87 was obtained when the reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach Alpha Method. The results were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Findings reveal that employability skills gained through Business Education significantly enhance graduates' integration into inclusive workplaces in South-South Nigeria. Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made among which includes Public universities should strengthen the practical components of Business Education programmes by partnering with industries to ensure that students acquire employability skills aligned with current labour market demands

Keywords: Business Education, Employability Skills, Graduates, Inclusive Workforce.

Introduction

In the dynamic global economy, employability skills have become essential indicators of graduates' readiness for workforce participation. Employability skills encompass a blend of cognitive, technical, and interpersonal competencies that enable individuals to gain, maintain,

and progress in employment (Tight, 2023). Within Nigerian universities, Business Education plays a crucial role in equipping students with these skills through the integration of entrepreneurial training, communication proficiency, problem-solving ability, and digital literacy (Ore, 2023). The acquisition of employability skills is not only fundamental for personal career success but also contributes to inclusive workforce integration by ensuring that graduates can adapt to diverse workplace environments and technological demands (Odiike, 2024).

Business Education programs in public universities in South-South Nigeria are designed to promote both theoretical and practical competencies that enhance graduate employability. According to Ezemma (2020), Business Education serves as a tool for manpower development, emphasizing administrative, managerial, and entrepreneurial capacities required in modern organizations. The curriculum emphasizes competencies in communication, accounting, marketing, entrepreneurship and information technology skills that foster adaptability and inclusion in the evolving workforce. Similarly, Udoh (2025) asserted that the effectiveness of Business Education is measured by how well its graduates can transition into meaningful employment and contribute to national development, especially within a region marked by socio-economic disparities.

Inclusive workforce integration refers to the ability of individuals from diverse educational, social, and demographic backgrounds to participate effectively in the labor market (Odiike, 2024). When Business Education effectively imparts employability skills, it enhances graduates' opportunities to integrate into various sectors, thereby promoting equality and sustainable economic participation. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited industrial collaboration, and outdated curriculum content continue to hinder the realization of these goals (Ore, 2023). Therefore, assessing employability skills acquired through Business Education becomes imperative for ensuring that public universities produce graduates capable of contributing to an inclusive and innovative workforce in South-South Nigeria.

Statement of Problem

In recent years, the issue of graduate unemployment in Nigeria has persisted despite the increasing number of higher institutions offering Business Education programmes. Employers continually express concern that many graduates inadequacy the essential employability skills such as communication, critical thinking, problem-solving, and digital literacy required to thrive in modern workplaces. This situation raises questions about the

effectiveness of Business Education programme in universities, particularly in the South-South region, in preparing students for real-world occupational demands.

Although Business Education is designed to equip learners with both theoretical and practical competencies, the disconnect between academic training and workplace expectations remains significant. Studies have shown that graduates often possess academic knowledge but fall short in soft skills, adaptability, and entrepreneurial readiness needed for inclusive workforce participation (Ore, 2023). This suggests that while Business Education programmes emphasize content delivery, they may not adequately integrate practical exposure, industrial collaboration, or modern pedagogical innovations that enhance employability.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study is to find out employability skills acquired and inclusive workforce integration of Business education students in Universities in South-South, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to;

1. To examine the extent to which Business Education programmes in public universities equip students with employability skills relevant to the modern labor market.
2. To find out how employability skills acquired in Business Education influences inclusive workforce of Business education students in South-South, Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study;

1. To what extent do Business Education programmes in public universities equip students with employability skills relevant to the modern labor market?
2. To what extent do employability skills acquired in Business Education influence inclusive workforce of Business education students in South-South Nigeria?

Hypothesis

The following hypotheses are tested at 0.05 level of significance;

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between Business Education programmes in public universities and the acquisition of employability skills relevant to the modern labor market.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between employability skills acquired through Business Education and graduates' integration into an inclusive workforce in South-South Nigeria.

Methodology

Descriptive research design was adopted for the study and the area for the study was in Public Universities in South-South Nigeria. The population of the study comprised of 1496 Business education final year students of 2024/2025 academic session in South-South offering Business education. Adopting the Taro Yamen formula, the sample size for the study was 316 Business education final year students. The instrument for data collection was the researcher developed questionnaire which was face and content validated by two Business education lecturers in Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni. The instruments used for the study titled “Assessment of Employability Skills Acquired Through Business Education and Their Influence on Inclusive Workforce Integration Questionnaire” (AESATBEIIWIQ). To establish the reliability of the instrument, copies of the instrument were distributed to 15 Business education students in Federal College of Education (Technical), Omoku. Cronbach Alpha formula was used to analyze the instrument using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 so as to establish the internal consistency of the instrument. Reliability coefficient values of were obtained for clusters B1 and B2 respectively with an overall coefficient value of 0.78. The questionnaire had 20 items in the two clusters. The instrument was structured on a four-point rating scale, with response categories as Strongly agree = 4, Agree = 3, Disagree = 2, and Strongly disagree = 1. The researcher administered copies of the instrument to the respondents in their various offices. Out of 316 copies of the instrument distributed, a total of 303 copies were successfully retrieved and were used for data analysis. The statistical tools used for answering the research questions were arithmetic mean and standard deviation. The class boundary for interpreting the result include: Strongly agree (3.50-4.0), Agree (2.50-3.49), Disagree (1.50-2.49) and Strongly disagree (1.00-1.49).

Results and Discussion of Findings

Research Question One: To what extent do Business Education programs in public universities equip students with employability skills relevant to the modern labor market?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on extent Business Education programs in public universities equip students with employability skills relevant to the modern labour market N=303

S/N	Items	X	SD	X
1.	The program integrates digital literacy and ICT competencies into classroom learning.	2.50	0.98	SA
2.	Business Education courses enhance my communication and interpersonal skills.	2.85	0.89	SA
3.	Entrepreneurship education within the program promotes creativity and innovation.	2.92	0.92	SA

4.	I have gained teamwork and collaboration skills from group-based learning activities.	3.23	0.81	SA
5.	The institution provides adequate training facilities for developing employability skills.	2.95	0.98	SA
6.	Industrial training experiences (SIWES) effectively improve students' job readiness.	3.15	0.92	SA
7.	Students are exposed to up-to-date technological tools relevant to modern businesses.	3.43	0.63	SA
8.	There is sufficient collaboration between the university and industries to improve students' employability.	3.20	0.61	SA
9.	I feel adequately prepared to compete in the contemporary labor market	3.43	0.71	SD
10.	The Business Education program includes modules that build leadership competencies	3.40	0.59	SA
Grand mean		3.11	0.80	SA

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The grand mean score of 3.11 indicates that respondents strongly agreed that Business Education programs in public universities equip students with employability skills relevant to the modern labor market. The standard deviation of 0.80 shows low dispersion in responses, suggesting a high level of consistency among respondents' opinions. This implies that Business Education programs are generally perceived as effective in developing employability competencies especially in areas such as ICT integration, teamwork, creativity, and leadership development across public universities in the South-South region of Nigeria.

Research Question Two: To what extent do employability skills acquired in Business Education influence inclusive workforce of Business education students in South-South Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation scores of employability skills acquired through Business Education influence graduates' integration into an inclusive workforce in South-South Nigeria N=303

S/N	Items	X	SD	X
1.	Employability skills acquired have helped graduates secure job opportunities.	2.76	0.86	SA
2.	Business Education graduates can effectively adapt to diverse workplace environments	2.83	0.91	SA
3.	Communication and interpersonal skills enhance collaboration in the workplace.	3.00	0.70	SA
4.	Employers recognize Business Education graduates as adequately skilled.	2.66	0.83	SA
5.	Employability skills promote inclusiveness and equal participation in the workforce	2.97	0.68	SA

6	Employability skills promote inclusiveness and equal participation in the workforce	3.5	0.68	SA
7	Graduates' entrepreneurial abilities create opportunities for self-employment	3.3	0.61	SA
8	Graduates' leadership and management skills improve workplace diversity management.	3.0	0.60	SA
9	Collaboration skills enable graduates to work effectively with individuals from different backgrounds.	3.2	0.63	SA
10	Graduates' adaptability to technological changes enhances workforce relevance.	3.7	0.82	SA
Grand mean		3.09	0.73	SA

Source: *field survey, 2025*

The computed Grand Mean of 3.09 indicates that respondents strongly agreed that employability skills acquired through Business Education significantly influence graduates' integration into an inclusive workforce in South-South Nigeria. The Standard Deviation of 0.73 shows low variability, meaning that respondents' views were relatively consistent.

Test of Hypothesis

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between Business Education programme in public universities and the acquisition of employability skills relevant to the modern labor market.

Table 1: Correlation Coefficient between Business Education programs in public universities and the acquisition of employability skills relevant to the modern labour market

		Business programme	Education Employability skills
Business Education programme	Pearson Correlation	1	.720**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	303	303
Employability Skills	Pearson Correlation	.720**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	303	303

****.** Correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output (2025).

The result in Table 1 shows a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.720 between Business Education programs in public universities and the acquisition of employability skills relevant to the modern labor market. This indicates a strong positive relationship between the two

variables. thep-value (sig. = 0.000) is less than the 0.05 level of significance, which means the relationship is statistically significant. therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{01}), which states that there is no significant relationship between business education programs and employability skill acquisition, is rejected. This implies that effective business education programs in public universities significantly enhance the acquisition of employability skills among students, making them better prepared for the modern labor market.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between employability skills acquired through Business Education and graduates' integration into an inclusive workforce in South-South Nigeria.

Table 2: Correlation Coefficient between employability skills acquired through Business Education and graduates' integration into an inclusive workforce in South-South Nigeria

		Employability Skills	Graduates' Integration
Employability Skills	Pearson Correlation	1	.704**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	303	303
Graduates' Integration	Pearson Correlation	.704**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	303	303

****.** Correlation is significant the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: SPSS Output (2025).

The result in Table 2 reveals a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.704 between employability skills acquired through Business Education and graduates' integration into an inclusive workforce in South-South Nigeria. This indicates a strong positive correlation between the two variables. The p-value (Sig. = 0.000) is less than the 0.05 level of significance, showing that the relationship is statistically significant. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{02}), which states that there is no significant relationship between employability skills and graduates' integration into an inclusive workforce, is rejected. This implies that the more employability skills graduates acquire through Business Education, the better their integration and participation in an inclusive workforce within South-South Nigeria.

Dissuasion of Findings**To what extent do Business Education programs in public universities equip students with employability skills relevant to the modern labor market?**

The finding from Table 1 revealed a strong positive and significant relationship between Business Education programs in public universities and the acquisition of employability skills relevant to the modern labor market. This implies that when Business Education programs are effectively structured incorporating ICT, entrepreneurship, communication, and problem-solving skills students are more likely to acquire competencies that enhance their employability and readiness for the labour market. This finding aligns with the study of Adebayo and Nwachukwu (2022), who reported that Business Education programs that emphasize technological and entrepreneurial content significantly improve students' employability competencies and labor market adaptability. Similarly, Ifeanyi (2023) observed that curriculum alignment with industry standards and practical exposure through internships or SIWES enhances the professional relevance of Business Education graduates in Nigeria's evolving economy.

However, this result contrasts with the view of Oyetunde (2021), who argued that despite the potential of Business Education, many Nigerian universities still rely on outdated curricula and inadequate instructional resources, which limit the actual employability impact of these programs. Oyetunde suggested that without consistent curriculum reform and stronger university-industry collaboration, the employability outcomes of Business Education graduates may remain below expectations.

To what extent do employability skills acquired in Business Education influence inclusive workforce of Business education students in South-South Nigeria?

The result presented in Table 2 indicates a strong positive and statistically significant relationship between employability skills acquired through Business Education and graduates' integration into an inclusive workforce in South-South Nigeria. This finding suggests that as Business Education graduates acquire more employability skills such as communication, adaptability, teamwork, digital competence, and leadership their chances of successfully integrating into inclusive and diverse work environments increase. The implication is that Business Education programs play a pivotal role in shaping graduates' readiness to participate effectively in the modern workforce, especially in contexts emphasizing inclusivity and equal opportunity.

This finding aligns with the report of Agboola (2022), who found that employers in Nigeria highly value employability skills and that graduates possessing such competencies demonstrate greater workplace adaptability and performance. The study emphasized that employability skills are not only technical but also involve interpersonal, problem-solving, and digital abilities that facilitate workplace integration and long-term career sustainability. Similarly, Akinwale and Akerele (2024) observed that contemporary workplaces in Nigeria and other parts of Africa increasingly prioritize soft skills such as leadership, collaboration, and cultural adaptability, which are critical for inclusive participation in diverse organizational settings. Their study confirmed that graduates who had undergone skill-oriented programs such as Business Education were better positioned to secure employment and contribute meaningfully to inclusive work teams.

However, this result does not go unchallenged. Olaniyi (2021) contended that while employability skills are essential, they alone do not guarantee workforce integration in Nigeria due to systemic issues such as limited job availability, weak industry linkages, and inadequate inclusive policies. The author argued that even when graduates possess relevant skills, structural and institutional barriers such as discrimination and poor employment networks often prevent full integration into the workforce. This opposing view highlights the importance of a broader systemic approach that combines employability skill development with inclusive labour policies and stronger university–industry partnerships.

Conclusion

The findings confirm that employability skills gained through Business Education significantly enhance graduates' integration into inclusive workplaces in South-South Nigeria. However, sustainable workforce inclusion also depends on supportive institutional policies and stronger industry linkages to complement these skills.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made based on the study;

1. Public universities should strengthen the practical components of Business Education programs by partnering with industries to ensure that students acquire employability skills aligned with current labor market demands.
2. Employers in South-South Nigeria should develop inclusive recruitment and training policies that recognize and utilize the diverse skills of Business Education graduates, promoting equitable integration into the workforce.

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