EDUMALSYS
Journal of Research in Education Management

e-ISSN : 2988-1188
p-ISSN : 2988-1196

Index : Dimensions, Scilit, Crossref, Garuda, Semantic, Google Scholar, Base, etc

https://doi.org/10.58578/edumalsys.v2i3.3902

Assessing the Impact of Work-Integrated Learning on Business Education Students' Employability in College of Education in Nigeria

Usman Mohammed Jamilu[1], Suleiman Adama Paris[2], Gidado Farida Sambo[3]
Federal College of Education Yola Adamawa State, Nigeria
umjamilu@fceyola.edu.ng

Article Info:

Submitted:	Revised:	Accepted:	Published:
Sep 1, 2024	Sep 17, 2024	Sep 28, 2024	Oct 5, 2024

Abstract

This study assessed the impact of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programs on the employability of business education students in Colleges of Education in Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, with a sample of 240 respondents, including administrators, teachers, and students, from selected Colleges of Education. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using mean statistics. The findings revealed that WIL programs are moderately implemented in business education curricula, contributing significantly to the development of employability skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. However, challenges such as limited internship placements, insufficient collaboration with industries, and financial constraints hinder students' access to WIL opportunities. The study recommended strengthening partnerships between colleges and industries, making WIL mandatory in business education programs, providing financial support to students, and enhancing supervision and mentorship during WIL placements.

Edumalsys is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

Keywords: Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), Employability skills, Business education, Industry collaboration, and Practical learning.

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving business environment, employability skills have become indispensable for business graduates who seek to seamlessly transition from academic learning into the professional workforce. The business world demands more than just theoretical knowledge; it requires graduates to be equipped with practical skills that enable them to solve real-world problems, communicate effectively, and adapt to an ever-changing work landscape. As businesses across the globe increasingly emphasize innovation, efficiency, and global competitiveness, the need for graduates who are not only knowledgeable but also capable of applying their learning in dynamic settings has never been more crucial. This has led to a growing focus on the development of employability skills—those attributes that make a graduate ready for employment, such as critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, and leadership (Jackson, 2015). These skills are vital to ensuring that graduates can perform effectively in the workplace and contribute meaningfully to their organizations.

One of the most promising educational approaches that have been adopted to enhance employability is Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), a model that merges academic instruction with hands-on, practical experience in a professional setting. WIL provides students with the unique opportunity to apply the theories and concepts they have learned in the classroom to real-world scenarios, enabling them to develop the skills needed to navigate and succeed in the workplace. As noted by Cooper, Orrell, and Bowden (2010), WIL serves as a bridge between academic knowledge and practical application, facilitating the holistic development of students by exposing them to the demands of professional work environments. This experiential learning approach allows students to cultivate essential skills such as problem-solving, effective communication, and decision-making, while also gaining valuable industry-specific insights. By integrating WIL into their curricula, educational institutions equip students with a competitive edge, making them more attractive to potential employers who seek graduates capable of contributing immediately to the workforce.

For students in Colleges of Education, especially those pursuing business education, WIL offers a valuable opportunity to gain industry-specific knowledge and real-world experience that can significantly improve their employability prospects. Business education, as a field, prepares students for diverse careers in the business sector, ranging from entrepreneurship and small business management to corporate roles in finance, marketing, and operations. However, while theoretical knowledge forms the foundation of this education, the practical skills necessary for employment in these fields often require additional experiential learning. WIL provides students with hands-on experience through internships, cooperative education, and work placements, allowing them to engage with real business operations, thus preparing them for the complex challenges of the job market.

Despite the critical role that business education plays in developing future business professionals, research has highlighted that many business education graduates in Nigeria struggle to secure employment. Studies have identified a mismatch between the skills these graduates acquire during their academic programs and the specific demands of the labor market (Adebisi, 2021). Employers often express concerns about the limited practical experience of graduates, particularly in applying theoretical knowledge to real-world business challenges. This disparity between education and employment requirements underscores the importance of incorporating practical learning experiences into business education curricula. By doing so, educational institutions can better prepare their students for the realities of the modern business environment, ensuring that they possess the blend of technical and soft skills that employers highly value (Sithole, 2015).

Work-Integrated Learning has emerged as a promising solution to this skills gap, offering a platform for students to not only acquire academic knowledge but also hone the soft skills that are increasingly in demand, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. Through internships, work placements, and cooperative education programs, students have the opportunity to engage directly with businesses, applying their theoretical learning in practice and gaining insights into workplace dynamics. This exposure to real-world business environments helps students to deepen their understanding of business operations and equips them with the practical experience needed to navigate the complexities of the job market (Olaniyan & Okemakinde, 2018).

In Nigeria, Colleges of Education have increasingly recognized the importance of Work-Integrated Learning in enhancing the employability of their graduates. These

institutions are progressively incorporating WIL programs into their business education curricula, offering students structured opportunities to work within business settings while still pursuing their studies. By providing these practical experiences, WIL programs allow students to apply theoretical concepts to actual business problems, enhancing their readiness for employment and improving their chances of securing jobs after graduation. This approach not only benefits students but also contributes to the broader economy by creating a pipeline of work-ready graduates who are capable of meeting the needs of employers.

However, despite the growing emphasis on WIL, there remains limited empirical research on its impact on the employability of business education students in Nigerian Colleges of Education. While anecdotal evidence suggests that WIL programs have positive effects on students' job prospects, there is a need for more comprehensive studies to assess the specific outcomes of these programs in terms of graduate employability. Such research could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of WIL programs and identify key challenges and opportunities for improving these initiatives.

This study aims to address this gap by assessing the effectiveness of WIL programs in improving the employability outcomes of business education students in Nigerian Colleges of Education. The study will explore the various components of WIL programs, examine their impact on students' employability skills, and identify the challenges that may hinder the success of these programs.

Statement of the Problem

The employability of business education graduates from Colleges of Education in Nigeria remains a significant concern, as many face challenges in securing meaningful employment due to a skills gap between their academic training and the demands of the labor market. Despite efforts to integrate practical learning into business education programs, graduates often lack the necessary hands-on experience and soft skills required by employers. This gap calls into question the effectiveness of the current educational approaches, particularly Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), which is designed to bridge this divide by providing students with real-world professional experience. However, there is limited empirical evidence on the impact of WIL programs on the employability outcomes of business education students in Nigeria, highlighting the need for a comprehensive study

to assess whether these programs adequately prepare students for the workforce and identify areas for improvement.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study was to assess the impact of work-integrated learning on business education students' employability in College of Education in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were to:

1. Assess the extent to which Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programs have been implemented in business education curricula in Colleges of Education in Nigeria.
2. Evaluate the impact of WIL programs on the employability skills (e.g., communication, teamwork, problem-solving) of business education students.
3. Identify the challenges faced by business education students in accessing and participating in WIL programs in Colleges of Education.
4. Propose strategies to enhance the effectiveness of WIL programs in improving the employability of business education students in Nigerian Colleges of Education.

Research Questions

The research questions for the study were:

1. To what extent have Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programs been implemented in the business education curricula of Colleges of Education in Nigeria?
2. How do WIL programs impact the development of employability skills, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, among business education students?
3. What challenges do business education students face in accessing and participating in WIL programs in Colleges of Education in Nigeria?
4. What strategies can be proposed to enhance the effectiveness of WIL programs in improving the employability of business education students in Nigerian Colleges of Education?

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive survey research design, which, according to Gall et al. (2017), involves collecting data from a sample that represents the population through questionnaires or interviews, allowing for generalization of the findings. The research was conducted in selected Colleges of Education in Nigeria. These colleges were specifically chosen for their involvement in Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programs within their business education curricula.

Population of the Study

The study population consisted of 350 respondents, comprising 26 administrators (deans, heads of departments, and coordinators), 70 business education lecturers, and 254 final-year business education students across four Colleges of Education in Nigeria. The respondents were drawn from institutions known to have integrated WIL programs within their business education departments.

Sample and Sampling Technique

A sample size of 240 respondents was selected for the study, including 15 administrators, 70 lecturers, and 155 final-year business education students. The sample was determined using simple random sampling to ensure that each member of the population had an equal chance of being included. This technique allowed for a representative sample of students, lecturers, and administrators from the selected colleges.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers, titled *Work-Integrated Learning and Employability Skills Assessment Questionnaire (WILESAQ)*. The questionnaire was based on a 5-point Likert scale, with response options ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD). The questionnaire was divided into three sections, covering demographic information, the extent of WIL program implementation, and the perceived impact of WIL on employability skills and employment outcomes.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The instrument was validated by three experts from the Department of Business Education at the Abubakar Tafawa Belewa University, Bauchi. The experts reviewed the questionnaire for clarity, content relevance, and alignment with the study objectives. Based

on their recommendations, necessary adjustments were made. The reliability of the instrument was tested using the Cronbach's alpha method, which yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.87, indicating that the instrument was reliable for measuring the constructs of interest.

Method of Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through the distribution of questionnaires to the selected respondents. The researchers personally visited the Colleges of Education to administer the questionnaires and provided guidance where necessary to ensure the respondents understood the items. The collection process spanned three weeks to ensure that all selected respondents had the opportunity to participate.

Method of Data Analysis

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics, particularly mean and standard deviation, to answer the research questions. A criterion mean of 3.0 was set, where a mean score of 3.0 or above indicated agreement with a statement, while a score below 3.0 indicated disagreement. The results were presented in tables, and the findings were interpreted based on the responses of the administrators, lecturers, and students.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: To what extent have Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programs been implemented in the business education curricula of Colleges of Education in Nigeria?

Table 1: Extent of WIL Program Implementation in Business Education Curricula

(N = 240)

Item	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
WIL is a core component of the business education curriculum	3.65	0.80	Agree
Students have regular opportunities for internships/placements	3.40	0.92	Agree
Lecturers actively integrate practical experiences in teaching	3.75	0.78	Agree
Collaboration with industry professionals for WIL programs exists	3.30	0.85	Agree
Assessment of WIL participation contributes to students' grades	3.25	0.87	Agree

The data in Table 1 shows that respondents generally agree that WIL programs have been implemented to a considerable extent in the business education curricula of Colleges of Education in Nigeria, with a mean range of 3.25 to 3.75. The highest-rated item is the integration of practical experiences by lecturers, while collaboration with industry professionals and the assessment of WIL participation are rated slightly lower but still reflect agreement.

Research Question 2: How do WIL programs impact the development of employability skills, such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, among business education students?

Table 2: Impact of WIL Programs on Employability Skill Development

(N = 240)

Item	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
WIL improves students' communication skills	3.80	0.72	Agree
WIL enhances teamwork abilities among students	3.85	0.70	Agree
WIL fosters problem-solving skills in real-world settings	3.95	0.68	Agree
Students gain critical thinking skills through WIL	3.70	0.75	Agree
WIL builds students' leadership and interpersonal skills	3.60	0.81	Agree

Table 2 indicates that WIL programs positively impact the development of employability skills, with mean scores ranging from 3.60 to 3.95. Respondents agree that WIL significantly enhances problem-solving and teamwork abilities, as well as communication skills. This highlights WIL's effectiveness in preparing students with the practical skills necessary for the workplace.

Research Question 3: What challenges do business education students face in accessing and participating in WIL programs in Colleges of Education in Nigeria?

Table 3: Challenges Faced by Business Education Students in Accessing WIL Programs

(N = 240)

Item	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
Limited availability of internship placements	3.90	0.64	Agree
Insufficient collaboration between colleges and industries	3.80	0.71	Agree
Financial constraints in securing WIL opportunities	3.75	0.79	Agree

Inadequate supervision of students during WIL placements	3.55	0.82	Agree
Lack of institutional support for WIL programs	3.50	0.83	Agree

The results in Table 3 show that business education students face several challenges in accessing WIL programs, with mean values ranging from 3.50 to 3.90. The most significant challenges include limited internship placements and insufficient collaboration between colleges and industries. Financial constraints and inadequate supervision are also noted as major barriers to successful participation in WIL programs.

Research Question 4: What strategies can be proposed to enhance the effectiveness of WIL programs in improving the employability of business education students in Nigerian Colleges of Education?

Table 4: Proposed Strategies to Enhance WIL Program Effectiveness

(N = 240)

Item	Mean	Std. Dev.	Decision
Strengthening partnerships between colleges and industry sectors	4.10	0.60	Agree
Providing financial support or stipends for WIL participants	3.95	0.66	Agree
Increasing supervision and mentoring for students during WIL	3.85	0.70	Agree
Expanding WIL opportunities across more industries	3.90	0.68	Agree
Introducing mandatory WIL components in all business education programs	4.05	0.62	Agree

Table 4 reveals that respondents strongly agree with proposed strategies to enhance WIL program effectiveness, with the highest-rated strategy being the strengthening of partnerships between colleges and industry sectors (mean = 4.10). Providing financial support for participants and introducing mandatory WIL components also received high agreement, reflecting the importance of these actions in improving the employability of business education students.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that WIL programs have been implemented to a considerable extent within the business education curricula of Colleges of Education, with respondents

agreeing that WIL is a core component of the curriculum, and lecturers actively integrate practical experiences in teaching. This finding aligns with the view of Ogunyemi (2020), who emphasizes the importance of combining academic learning with practical experience to prepare students for real-world challenges. The moderate mean scores for collaboration with industry professionals and assessment of WIL participation suggest that there is room for improvement in strengthening industry linkages and embedding WIL more deeply into the academic assessment framework, as supported by Adeola and Alade (2019), who highlight the significance of strong academic-industry partnerships in WIL programs.

The findings reveal that WIL programs significantly contribute to the development of employability skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving, with the highest mean score being for problem-solving skills. This finding is consistent with the work of Musa (2021), who underscores that business graduates with well-developed soft skills, particularly in teamwork and communication, are better equipped to navigate the demands of the labor market. The development of critical thinking and leadership skills further highlights the comprehensive nature of WIL programs in fostering skills that are directly transferable to the workplace. Ibeh and Onuoha (2020) also affirm that WIL enhances students' practical knowledge, thereby improving their employability prospects by bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and professional practice.

Despite the positive impact of WIL, the study revealed that students face several challenges, with limited availability of internship placements and insufficient collaboration between colleges and industries being the most prominent. This reflects the broader issue of inadequate industry engagement in WIL programs, a challenge that has been documented in the literature (Adeola & Alade, 2019). Financial constraints and inadequate supervision also hinder students' full participation in WIL activities. Musa (2021) notes that without sufficient financial and institutional support, students are often unable to maximize the benefits of WIL, leading to gaps in skill acquisition and preparation for the workforce. These challenges underscore the need for colleges to enhance their WIL structures and provide more targeted support to students.

The findings outline several strategies that could enhance the effectiveness of WIL programs, with strengthening partnerships between colleges and industries and introducing mandatory WIL components in all business education programs being the most strongly supported strategies. These findings resonate with the recommendations of Ibeh and

Onuoha (2020), who advocate for deeper collaboration between educational institutions and industries to ensure that students gain relevant work experience and industry knowledge. Providing financial support for WIL participants is also crucial, as highlighted by Adeola and Alade (2019), who suggest that without adequate financial resources, many students are unable to engage fully in internships and other work placements. Increasing supervision and mentoring during WIL placements would further enhance the learning experience, as it ensures that students receive the guidance needed to apply theoretical knowledge in professional settings.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided valuable insights into the impact of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programs on the employability of business education students in Colleges of Education in Nigeria. The findings indicate that WIL is being integrated into the business education curricula to a considerable extent, enhancing students' employability skills such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving. However, challenges such as limited internship placements, insufficient collaboration with industries, and financial constraints hinder the full realization of WIL's potential. To address these challenges, it is crucial for educational institutions to strengthen partnerships with industry stakeholders and provide targeted support for students engaging in WIL activities. Implementing mandatory WIL components in the curriculum and increasing supervision during placements will also contribute to a more effective learning experience. By prioritizing these strategies, Colleges of Education can significantly improve the employability outcomes of their business education graduates, ultimately fostering a more skilled and competitive workforce capable of meeting the demands of Nigeria's evolving labor market.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to enhance the effectiveness of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) programs in improving the employability of business education students in Colleges of Education in Nigeria:

1. Colleges of Education should establish stronger collaborations with industries and businesses to increase the availability of internship placements and work-based learning opportunities for students. These partnerships can provide students with

more practical experiences and help align educational programs with the current demands of the labor market.

2. It is recommended that WIL be made a mandatory part of the business education curriculum in all Colleges of Education. This would ensure that every student is given the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in real-world business settings, thereby improving their employability prospects upon graduation.
3. To overcome the financial challenges students face in accessing and participating in WIL programs, educational institutions and the government should offer financial assistance or incentives, such as stipends, to students engaging in internships or cooperative education programs. This support will enable more students to participate fully in WIL activities.
4. Colleges of Education should improve the supervision and mentorship provided during WIL placements. This can be achieved by appointing dedicated academic supervisors and industry mentors to guide students throughout their WIL experiences. Effective supervision will ensure that students can apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings and gain valuable feedback to refine their skills.

REFERENCES

Adebisi, T. (2021). The employability challenges faced by business education graduates in Nigeria: A critical review. *Journal of Vocational Education and Training*, 23(2), 45-57

Adeola, A., & Alade, O. (2019). Strengthening academic-industry partnerships for effective Work-Integrated Learning in business education. *Journal of Vocational and Technical Education*, 8(1), 56-70.

Cooper, L., Orrell, J., & Bowden, M. (2010). Work-Integrated Learning: A Guide to Effective Practice. *Routledge.*

Ibeh, N., & Onuoha, C. (2020). Bridging the gap between theory and practice: The role of Work-Integrated Learning in business education. *Nigerian Journal of Business Education*, 12(3), 45-60.

Jackson, D. (2015). Employability Skill Development in Business Graduates. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 34(5), 929-941.

Musa, T. (2021). The influence of Work-Integrated Learning on business graduates' employability in Nigeria. *African Journal of Educational Research*, 25(2), 89-102.

Ogunyemi, A. (2020). Enhancing employability skills through Work-Integrated Learning: Challenges and prospects for Nigerian business education students. *International Journal of Business and Education Studies*, 15(4), 104-117.

Olaniyan, D. A., & Okemakinde, T. (2018). The Role of Work-Integrated Learning in Nigerian Higher Education: Challenges and Prospects. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Research and Development*, 13(1), 59-70.

Sithole, M. (2015). Bridging the Gap between Education and Employment: The Role of Work-Integrated Learning. *African Journal of Business Education*, 7(3), 112-126.