

ENTREPRENEURSHIP COMPETENCIES REQUIRED OF BUSINESS EDUCATION GRADUATES FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This study explored the essential strategic thinking and leadership competencies that business education students need to improve their employability. The study was guided by two research questions, which were answered using descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation, while two research hypotheses were formulated and tested using inferential statistics of independent sample t-test at the 0.05 level of significance. Data were collected from 148 business education students through structured questionnaires and analyzed accordingly. Findings highlighted critical competencies such as evaluation of solutions, long-term planning, effective communication, team management, and emotional intelligence as vital for employability. Additionally, the analysis revealed no significant differences in perceptions based on gender or students' residential status. The integration of these analytical approaches provided comprehensive insights, leading to practical recommendations for government and institutional actions aimed at enhancing the employability prospects of business education graduates.

Keywords: Competency, entrepreneurship, leadership, strategic thinking, sustainable

Introduction

Entrepreneurs in all cultures are agents of social and economic development and positive changes. They are the innovative individuals that spearhead the establishment of new forms of social and economic organisations. Entrepreneur as an agent of social transformation, create new organisational forms, new employment, stimulate indigenous technology, motivate employees and play a number of leadership roles. The competency of entrepreneurs and perceived influence on the employability of business education students is increasingly significant in today's dynamic job market. Employability has become a key concern for educational institutions, policymakers, and students alike, as the transition from education to employment is crucial for economic development and individual success. Entrepreneurship competency encompasses a range of skills and attributes that enhance an individual's ability to start and manage businesses effectively. These competencies are seen as critical for fostering innovation, economic growth, and job creation (Adebayo & Adeleke, 2020).

The competency of entrepreneurs and their perceived influence on the employability of business education students is increasingly significant in today's dynamic job market. Employability has become a key concern for educational institutions, policymakers, and students alike, as the transition from education to employment is crucial for economic development and individual success. Entrepreneurship competency encompasses a range of skills and attributes that enhance an individual's ability to start and manage businesses effectively. According to Adeoye (2017), these competencies are critical for fostering innovation, economic growth, and job creation. Entrepreneurship competency involves various skills, including creativity, risk-taking, problem-solving, and leadership, which are essential for starting and running a successful business. He equally posited that entrepreneurship education aims to equip students with these skills, thereby enhancing their employability prospects. As economies worldwide shift towards knowledge-based and innovation-driven paradigms, the demand for individuals with entrepreneurial skills has grown substantially.

Strategic thinking is widely recognized as a core entrepreneurial competency that significantly enhances employability, especially in the context of business education. It refers to the ability to plan for the future, anticipate potential challenges, and devise long-term strategies for success in both employment and entrepreneurial ventures. In the competitive job market, employers increasingly seek graduates who possess strategic thinking skills, as these individuals are better equipped to solve complex problems, adapt to changes, and drive innovation (Akindele & Ige, 2019). Strategic thinking is a crucial entrepreneurial competency that involves analysing complex situations, identifying opportunities and developing plans to achieve long-term goals. According to Liedtka (2020), strategic thinking encompasses key components such as system thinking, innovative thinking and vision oriented thinking. These components enable entrepreneur to make informed decisions, stay ahead of competitors and drive business growth.

According to Smith and Brown (2020), the development of strategic thinking among business education students is fundamental to their ability to navigate complex business environments. Their study emphasized the importance of training students to evaluate multiple solutions before making decisions and to engage in systematic long-term planning. These skills, they argued, not only promote analytical reasoning but also foster adaptability, which is a key trait sought by modern employers. They found that students who had received targeted instruction in critical and strategic thinking demonstrated stronger workplace readiness and outperformed their peers in problem-solving scenarios. Relatedly, Johnson et al (2022) explored the role of strategic thinking within the broader context of employability skills. Their research highlighted that graduates equipped with the ability to anticipate future trends and make proactive decisions are more competitive in the job market. They identified strategic foresight, critical reasoning, and solution-based thinking as core components of employability, especially in dynamic business settings. The authors also underscored that educational institutions should embed these competencies within curricula to better align student skills with workforce demands.

Leadership competency is another crucial factor influencing employability of business education graduates. It involves the capacity to inspire, guide, and manage teams toward achieving organizational objectives. Developing strong leadership skills is essential for business education

students, as it enhances their ability to manage business operations effectively and adapt to entrepreneurial roles (Lee and Kim, 2021). Leadership involves the ability to guide, motivate, and manage teams effectively, which are highly sought-after skills in the contemporary job market. Employers are not only interested in technical knowledge but also in graduates who can demonstrate the ability to lead, make decisions, and collaborate with others to achieve organizational goals (Goleman, 2019).

The employability of business education students is influenced by various factors, including the quality of education, the relevance of the curriculum, and the level of practical exposure they receive. According to Nwosu (2017), the integration of entrepreneurship competency into business education programs can significantly enhance students' employability by providing them with the skills and knowledge required to thrive in the job market. Nwosu suggested that entrepreneurship education should not only focus on theoretical knowledge but also emphasize experiential learning, such as internships, project-based learning, and real-world business challenges. However, the perception of entrepreneurship competency as a determinant of employability is supported by empirical research. Studies have shown that students who possess strong entrepreneurial skills are more likely to secure employment, start their own businesses, and contribute to economic development (Olawale & Garwe, 2010). According to Olawale and Garwe, entrepreneurship competencies include a broad range of skills, such as opportunity recognition, strategic thinking, and effective communication, which are highly valued by employers across various industries. These competencies not only enhance employability but also foster a proactive and innovative workforce capable of driving economic growth.

The relevance of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized as Ugoani (2015) opined that, the Nigerian economy faces numerous challenges, including high unemployment rates and a need for economic diversification. Entrepreneurship education is seen as a viable solution to these challenges, as it encourages the creation of new businesses and job opportunities. According to Ugoani, fostering entrepreneurship competency among business education students is crucial for addressing unemployment and promoting sustainable economic development in Nigeria. The influence of entrepreneurship competency on the employability of business education students is a critical area of study that has significant implications for educational practices and policies. Understanding the role of entrepreneurship education in enhancing employability, educational institutions can develop more effective programmes that equip students with the necessary skills to succeed in the competitive job market. According to Adeoye (2017) and Adebisi and Oni (2012), fostering entrepreneurship competencies is essential for preparing students to navigate the complexities of the modern workforce and contribute to economic development. This study aims to explore the relationship between entrepreneurship competency and employability, providing insights that can inform the design and implementation of business education programs.

Gender disparity in employability perceptions has remained a recurring theme in education and labor market research. Taylor and Francis (2023) examined how male and female students perceive employability competencies and reported subtle but meaningful differences in how these groups prioritize and internalize essential skills. Their study revealed that while both genders value

strategic thinking and leadership, female students tended to emphasize collaboration and planning, whereas male students were more likely to rate decision-making and assertiveness higher. The researchers concluded that these perceptual differences may influence the self-efficacy and career choices of students, and recommended that educators adopt gender-sensitive approaches when delivering employability content. In the context of business education, such disparities highlight the importance of creating inclusive learning experiences that account for diverse viewpoints in developing strategic and leadership competencies.

In another relevant contribution, Ahmed and Wang (2020) investigated how environmental and contextual factors shape students' readiness for employment. Their research found that access to learning resources, residence type (e.g., hostel vs. off-campus), and institutional support significantly impacted students' acquisition of employability skills. They emphasized that students living in more academically enriched environments such as campus hostels were more exposed to structured peer learning and faculty mentorship, which contributed positively to their confidence in applying leadership competencies.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, Nigeria, has faced significant challenges related to unemployment and underemployment among graduates. Despite the efforts of various educational institutions to provide quality education, many business education graduates find it difficult to secure gainful employment. This issue raises questions about the effectiveness of current educational programmes in equipping students with the necessary skills and competencies needed in the job market. Entrepreneurship education has been identified as a potential solution to the unemployment crisis in Nigeria. However, there is a notable gap in understanding the extent to which entrepreneurship competency influences the employability of business education students in Nigeria. According to Ugoani (2015), the Nigerian economy requires innovative approaches to tackle unemployment, and entrepreneurship education is seen as a viable strategy. Yet, the integration of entrepreneurship competencies into business education programme remains inconsistent and inadequately researched.

As noted by Adeoye (2017), the local economic environment significantly affects the success of entrepreneurship education programme. Ogun State, with its diverse economic activities and industrial growth, presents a unique case for examining the relationship between entrepreneurship competency and employability. The lack of empirical evidence on the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in enhancing employability among business education students in Ogun State underscores the need for this research. As Adebisi and Oni (2012) pointed out, without a clear understanding of the specific competencies that contribute to employability, educational institutions may struggle to design effective curricula that meet the needs of the job market. However, if this study is not carried out, the lofty objective of business education in preparing its recipients for a better future will be inhibited to the detriment of national development. Hence, the need for this study.

Purpose of the Study

The general purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of entrepreneurship competency on business education student employability. Specifically, the study sought to:

- identify strategic thinking competency needed by business education student for employability
- determine leadership competency needed by business education students for employability

Research Questions

1. What strategic thinking competencies are needed by business education students for employability?
2. What leadership competencies are required by business education students for employability?

Research Hypothesis

The following null hypothesis were tested at 0.05 level of significance

1. Male and female business education students do not differ in their mean rating on the influence of strategic thinking entrepreneurship competencies needed for employability
2. Business education students residing in the college hostel and off-campus do not differ in their mean rating on the influence of leadership competencies required for employability.

Methodology

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for this study. The study was carried out in Federal College of Education Abeokuta. The population of the study was 406 business education students in 2024/2025 academic session which comprised Year 1 (138); Year 2 (120) and Year 3 (148). The study employed purposive sampling to select participants. The focus was on final-year business education students at Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, as they are in the best position to provide relevant insights into the perceived influence of entrepreneurship competencies on employability. A total of 148 final-year business education students were purposively selected for the study. These students were chosen because of their imminent transition into the workforce, making them ideal respondents for evaluating the research purposes. The primary instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire designed by the researcher. The questionnaire was developed based on a thorough review of relevant literature and aligned with the study's objectives. The instrument was divided into two sections. Section A captured demographic information such as age, gender, and residence area of the respondents while Section B included items designed to measure the key entrepreneurship competencies (strategic thinking and leadership) and their perceived influence on employability. Respondents rated each item on a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and Strongly Disagree (SD). Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The items of the research questions were analysed using descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations while the hypothesis were tested using independent simple t-test at 0.05 level of significance. The results were presented in tables, and conclusions and recommendations were drawn based on the findings.

Results

Research Question 1: What strategic thinking competencies are needed by business education students for employability?

Table 1: Strategic Thinking Competencies Needed by Business Education

Items	MEAN	S.D
Business education students need the ability to evaluate multiple solutions before making decisions to enhance employability.	3.66	0.55
Strategic thinking skills in business education students are crucial for improving employability.	2.59	0.92
Business education students should demonstrate long-term planning to boost employability prospects.	3.14	0.94
Problem-solving through critical thinking is necessary for business education students to succeed in the job market.	2.63	0.81
Business education students must prioritize tasks effectively to increase employability.	3.26	0.92
Developing innovative solutions to business challenges is a crucial	3.05	0.97
Critical thinking is an essential competency to evaluate business information and make informed decisions	3.02	0.95
Anticipating future trends and opportunities is required for employability	3.07	0.97
	3.05	
Cluster Mean		

Table 1 shows that the mean scores of the items range from 3.11 to 3.66. The standard deviations range between 0.55 and 0.97, revealing that the mean scores do not vary in the respondents' decisions. More so, the cluster mean of 3.05 indicates that the respondents are in the opinion that strategic thinking competencies such as; evaluation of multiple solutions, long term planning, problem solving skills, prioritizing tasks and anticipation of future trends and opportunities are needed by business education students for employability.

Research Question 2: What leadership competencies are required by business education students for employability?

Items	MEAN	S.D
Business education students need leadership skills to communicate effectively and improve employability.	3.37	0.83
Leadership competency in managing teams is essential for business education students seeking employment.	3.24	0.81
Business education students should demonstrate the ability to motivate others to enhance employability.	3.19	0.91
Business education students need to take responsibility for group outcomes to increase employability.	3.18	0.86
Effective decision-making in leadership roles is critical for the employability of business education students.	2.63	0.81
Coaching and mentorship are important leadership skills for business education students	3.14	0.88
Emotional intelligence is essential for effective leadership in business education	3.44	0.81
Cluster Mean	3.17	

Table 2 reveals that the mean scores of the items range from 2.63 to 3.44. The standard deviations range between 0.81 and 0.91, indicating that the mean scores do not vary. Furthermore, the cluster mean of 3.17 indicates that the respondents are in opinion that leadership skills such as communication competency, managing team, motivation, group outcomes, decision making, emotional intelligence, coaching and mentorship are needed by business education students for employability.

Research Hypotheses 1: Male and female business education students do not differ in their mean rating on the influence of strategic thinking entrepreneurship competencies needed for employability

Summary of results on Table 3 shows that total p-value is .169 which is greater than 0.05, implies that no significant difference in the mean ratings of responses of male and female respondents on view of business education students as regards strategic thinking entrepreneurship competencies and employability.

Table 3: Independent sample t-test of mean ratings of male and female business education students on strategic thinking competencies needed for employability.

Gender	N	Mean	SD	DF	Alpha	t-cal	p-value	Decision
Male	59	3.63	0.78	146	0.05	1.38	.169	Not Significant
Female	89	3.77	0.72					

Research Hypothesis 2: Business education students residing in the college hostel and off-campus do not differ in their mean rating on the influence of leadership competencies required for employability

Table 4: Independent sample t-test of mean ratings of business education students residing in the college hostel and off-campus on leadership competencies required for employability.

Residence	N	Mean	SD	DF	Alpha	t-cal	p-value	Decision
College Hostel	67	3.69	0.52	146	0.05	0.74	.461	Not Significant
Off Campus	81	3.64	0.48					

Summary of result on Table 4 shows that total of P-value is .461 which is greater than 0.05, implies that no significant difference in the mean ratings of business education students residing on college hostel and off campus on the influence of leadership competencies required for employability.

Discussion of Findings

The results of data analysis as presented in Table 1 indicated that business education students need a variety of strategic thinking competencies for employability. The respondents were of the view that skills such as evaluating multiple solutions before making decisions, long-term planning, problem-solving through critical thinking, prioritizing tasks effectively, and anticipating future trends are crucial for enhancing employability. The cluster mean score of 3.05 further confirms that these competencies are considered important by the respondents. This finding aligns with the assertion of Smith and Brown (2020) that strategic thinking skills enable graduates to adapt to complex business environments, thereby increasing their employability. Similarly, Johnson et al. (2022) emphasized the importance of problem-solving and critical thinking as fundamental employability skills in business education.

The data presented in Table 2 also revealed that leadership competencies are essential for the employability of business education students. Respondents agreed that communication skills, team management, motivation, responsibility for group outcomes, decision-making, coaching,

mentorship, and emotional intelligence are necessary leadership skills that business education students must possess. The cluster mean of 3.17 supports the high value placed on leadership competencies. This result is consistent with findings by Lee and Kim (2021), who noted that leadership skills enhance graduates' ability to navigate workplace challenges and improve team performance. Furthermore, emotional intelligence, highlighted as a key leadership competency in this study, has been identified by Goleman (2019) as critical for effective leadership and career success.

On the test of hypothesis regarding gender differences in strategic thinking competencies (Table 3), the results indicated no significant difference between male and female business education students in their mean ratings. This implies that both genders perceive the importance of strategic thinking competencies equally for employability. This finding concurs with the study by Taylor and Francis (2023) which found no gender disparity in perceptions of employability skills among business students.

Similarly, the test of hypothesis on residence differences in leadership competencies (Table 4) showed no significant difference between students residing in college hostels and those living off-campus. This suggests that students' living arrangements do not influence their views on the leadership skills needed for employability. This supports the conclusion of Ahmed and Wang (2020) that environmental factors such as residence have minimal impact on students' perception of employability skills, as these competencies are largely shaped by academic and personal development experiences.

In summary, the findings highlight the critical role of both strategic thinking and leadership competencies in preparing business education students for employability. The lack of significant differences based on gender and residence indicates a shared understanding among students about the importance of these competencies, which business education programs should aim to develop comprehensively.

Conclusion

This study has established that strategic thinking and leadership competencies are essential for the employability of business education students. The findings revealed that skills such as critical evaluation, long-term planning, problem-solving, effective communication, team management, motivation, and emotional intelligence are perceived as vital by the students themselves. Additionally, the absence of significant differences based on gender and residence underscores a shared recognition of these competencies' importance across diverse student groups. Therefore, business education programs should prioritize the integration and development of these competencies to better prepare graduates for the dynamic demands of the job market and enhance their chances of sustainable employment.

Recommendations

Based on the result interpretation and discussion, the following is recommended from this study:

1. Curriculum planners of business education programme should design and implement curriculum activities and training programmes that specifically focus on developing strategic thinking competencies which will better equip students with the critical thinking skills needed to navigate complex business environments and improve their employability prospects.
2. Colleges and universities offering business education should incorporate leadership training modules for students to engage in coaching, mentorship, and leadership roles which will enhance their readiness for employment and career advancement.

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- Wonder Hands Journal (2026) |Entrepreneurship Competencies required of Business Education Graduates for Sustainable National Development
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