

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-55826

Title: IDENTIFYING OPTIMAL STRATEGIES FOR INTEGRATING EMERGING EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS INTO BUSINESS EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN UNIVERSITIES, IN SOUTH EAST UNIVERSITIES, NIGERIA,

Recommendation:

Accept as it is

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		√		
Techn. Quality			√	
Clarity		√		
Significance			√	

Reviewer Name: Dr. Manju M

Detailed Reviewer's Report

1. Contemporary Relevance of Employability Skills

The study is grounded in the contemporary reality that employability skills have become central to graduate success in the 21st-century labour market. Rapid technological advancement and shifting organizational structures demand graduates who possess adaptable, transferable skills. Traditional academic knowledge alone is no longer sufficient for workplace effectiveness. Employers increasingly prioritize skills such as problem-solving, communication, and digital competence. Universities therefore face mounting pressure to redesign curricula to reflect these expectations. This context establishes a strong justification for examining employability skills integration. The study appropriately aligns with global discourse on higher education relevance.

2. Universities as Human Capital Development Hubs

Universities are portrayed as critical institutions for human capital formation and national development. Beyond degree certification, they are expected to nurture creativity, innovation, and work readiness among students. Nigerian universities, in particular, are tasked with preparing graduates for both employment and self-reliance. The study reinforces this role by linking university education to workforce preparedness. It highlights the responsibility of universities to respond proactively to labour market changes. This positioning strengthens the conceptual foundation of the research. It also aligns with national education policy objectives.

3. Nigerian Graduate Unemployment Crisis

The research situates itself within the persistent challenge of graduate unemployment in Nigeria. Despite increased access to higher education, many graduates remain unemployed or underemployed. The study acknowledges that academic qualifications alone no longer guarantee employment opportunities. This mismatch between graduate output and labour market demand creates social and economic strain. The problem is particularly visible among business education graduates. By foregrounding this crisis, the study underscores the urgency of curriculum reform. This contextual framing enhances the study's policy relevance.

4. Business Education as a Strategic Intervention

Business education is presented as a strategic programme for addressing unemployment and promoting economic participation. It is designed to equip students with vocational, managerial, and entrepreneurial competencies. The study emphasizes its dual focus on office occupations and general business skills. Ideally, graduates should be prepared for employment, self-employment, and career mobility. However,

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the study questions whether current programmes meet these expectations. This critical stance strengthens the research problem. It positions business education as both a solution and a subject of scrutiny.

5. Conceptualization of Employability Skills

Employability skills are defined as a blend of technical and soft skills that enable individuals to obtain, retain, and progress in employment. The study acknowledges skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and digital literacy. These skills support effective job performance across sectors. The inclusion of emotional intelligence and global awareness reflects emerging workplace demands. This broad conceptualization aligns with international frameworks. It ensures that the study captures the multidimensional nature of employability. Such clarity strengthens construct validity.

6. Emergence of 21st-Century Workplace Demands

The study highlights how globalization, automation, and digitalization are reshaping job roles. Modern workplaces are dynamic, technology-driven, and problem-centred. Employers seek graduates who can learn continuously and adapt quickly. Static, theory-heavy curricula are increasingly inadequate. This reality places pressure on business education programmes to evolve. The study correctly links these changes to curriculum and pedagogical reform. It reinforces the need for forward-looking educational strategies.

7. Skill Integration as a Deliberate Educational Process

Integrating employability skills is presented as a conscious and systematic process rather than an incidental outcome. It requires deliberate curriculum planning and instructional design. The study emphasizes embedding skills within learning experiences. This approach goes beyond standalone skill courses. It promotes contextualized learning aligned with real-world applications. Such integration demands pedagogical innovation from lecturers. The study's emphasis here reflects best practices in curriculum development.

8. Role of Business Education Lecturers

Lecturers are identified as central agents in the integration of employability skills. Their teaching strategies, attitudes, and competencies directly influence skill acquisition. The study recognizes the need for lecturers to identify emerging skills proactively. Continuous professional development is therefore essential. Without skilled lecturers, curriculum reform remains ineffective. This focus acknowledges human resource dimensions of educational change. It also justifies examining lecturers' perceptions.

9. Teaching Strategies for Skill Development

The study reviews pedagogical strategies such as project-based learning, collaborative learning, and experiential activities. These approaches promote active engagement and real-world problem solving. They contrast sharply with traditional lecture-based methods. Effective skill integration requires students to apply knowledge in practical contexts. The study aligns with evidence-based teaching practices. This strengthens its theoretical grounding. It also provides a basis for evaluating current practices.

10. Industry–University Collaboration

Collaboration with industry is highlighted as a critical strategy for aligning education with labour market needs. Industry input ensures curriculum relevance and authenticity. It exposes students to real workplace expectations. The study notes weak collaboration as a recurring challenge in Nigerian universities. Strengthening partnerships could bridge skill gaps. This point is particularly relevant in business education. It reinforces the practical orientation of the study.

11. Curriculum Review and Responsiveness

Regular curriculum review is identified as essential for maintaining relevance. Static curricula risk becoming outdated in fast-changing economies. The study recognizes curriculum updating as a formal mechanism for skill integration. However, implementation appears inconsistent across institutions. Effective review requires stakeholder involvement and institutional commitment. This observation highlights systemic issues. It also justifies examining institutional practices empirically.

12. Technology-Enhanced Learning

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The use of digital tools and ICT is recognized as vital for developing modern employability skills. Technology supports flexible learning and digital literacy. The study evaluates the extent to which technology is used in teaching. Limited utilization suggests missed opportunities for skill development. This finding reflects broader infrastructural challenges. It underscores the need for investment in educational technology. The point is well aligned with global trends.

13. Experiential Learning Opportunities

Internships, industrial visits, and practical engagements are emphasized as powerful learning tools. These experiences allow students to apply theory in authentic contexts. The study finds limited implementation of such opportunities. This gap weakens students' readiness for employment. Experiential learning also fosters professional identity formation. Its absence represents a significant shortcoming. The study appropriately flags this concern.

14. Soft Skills Development

Soft skills such as communication, leadership, and critical thinking are essential across professions. The study examines whether these skills are explicitly addressed. Findings suggest inadequate structured soft-skills training. This omission limits graduates' workplace effectiveness. Integrating soft skills requires intentional curriculum design. The study's attention to this issue is timely. It reflects employer priorities globally.

15. Collaborative Learning Practices

Collaborative teaching strategies promote teamwork and interpersonal skills. The study reports moderate use of such strategies. While encouraging, this alone is insufficient for comprehensive skill integration. Collaboration should extend beyond classroom activities. It should involve industry and interdisciplinary engagement. The study hints at this limitation. This nuanced interpretation strengthens the findings.

16. Lecturer Professional Development

Professional development workshops are identified as one of the few strategies moderately implemented. Continuous training enhances lecturers' pedagogical competence. However, training frequency and depth may vary. The study suggests that existing efforts are insufficient. Professional development must be aligned with emerging skill demands. This point underscores the importance of institutional support. It highlights capacity-building needs.

17. Student Involvement in Skill Planning

Active student participation in identifying and planning skill development is minimal. The study notes strong disagreement on this practice. Student agency is crucial for meaningful learning. Involving students enhances motivation and ownership. Its absence reflects traditional teacher-centred approaches. This finding reveals a critical pedagogical gap. Addressing it could improve learning outcomes.

18. Resource Constraints

Limited funding and resources emerge as major barriers to strategy implementation. Adequate resources are necessary for technology, training, and partnerships. Budgetary constraints restrict innovation. The study identifies this as a systemic issue. Resource limitations affect both lecturers and students. This reinforces the need for policy-level intervention. The finding is consistent with prior research.

19. Administrative and Leadership Support

Strong leadership is essential for driving curriculum reform. The study finds lack of administrative support to be a significant hindrance. Without leadership commitment, initiatives stall. Effective leadership enables coordination and accountability. This issue affects policy implementation across institutions. The study's identification of this factor adds organizational depth. It highlights governance challenges.

20. Lecturer Training Deficiencies

Inadequate training opportunities limit lecturers' ability to adopt innovative strategies. Emerging skills require updated pedagogical knowledge. The study reports strong agreement on this constraint. This finding underscores human capacity challenges. Continuous upskilling is necessary in dynamic

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environments. Addressing this gap is essential for sustainable reform. The study rightly emphasizes this issue.

21. Resistance to Change

Resistance to pedagogical change is identified as a moderate barrier. Some lecturers may prefer traditional teaching methods. Change resistance can slow innovation. Addressing attitudes is as important as providing resources. Professional learning communities could mitigate resistance. The study's inclusion of this factor adds behavioural insight. It highlights the complexity of reform processes.

22. Dominance of Traditional Teaching Methods

Reliance on lecture-based teaching limits skill development. Such methods emphasize content delivery over application. The study finds continued dominance of traditional approaches. This restricts active learning opportunities. Shifting pedagogical culture requires support and incentives. The finding reflects structural inertia. It reinforces the need for teaching reform.

23. Awareness of Emerging Skills

Limited awareness of emerging employability skills among lecturers is reported. Awareness precedes effective integration. Without understanding labour market trends, lecturers cannot adapt curricula. This gap suggests the need for exposure to industry trends. Professional development should address this explicitly. The study's identification of this issue is critical. It points to knowledge dissemination needs.

24. Workload and Time Constraints

Heavy workloads constrain lecturers' ability to innovate. Time pressures limit curriculum redesign and collaboration. The study finds this to be a strong barrier. Structural workload issues affect teaching quality. Addressing this requires institutional policy adjustments. The finding highlights operational constraints. It adds realism to the analysis.

25. Weak Industry Engagement

Limited engagement with industry experts restricts curriculum relevance. Industry collaboration provides insight into current skill demands. The study identifies this as a recurring challenge. Strengthening partnerships could enhance employability outcomes. This finding aligns with global best practices. It reinforces the need for external stakeholder involvement. The point is well substantiated.

26. Dynamic Nature of Job Market

Constant changes in industry trends complicate curriculum planning. Skills become obsolete quickly. The study acknowledges this volatility as a challenge. Adaptive curriculum frameworks are needed. This requires continuous monitoring of labour markets. The finding emphasizes the need for flexibility. It highlights the difficulty of keeping pace with change.

27. Uniformity Across Institutional Ownership

The study finds no significant difference based on ownership of institution. Both federal and state universities exhibit similar challenges. This suggests systemic issues rather than isolated cases. Standardized curriculum requirements may explain uniformity. The finding enhances generalizability. It indicates nationwide relevance. This strengthens the study's implications.

28. Consistency with Previous Studies

The findings align with earlier research on employability skill gaps. Similar challenges have been reported across Nigerian institutions. This consistency supports the credibility of results. It situates the study within existing literature. The alignment reinforces the validity of conclusions. It also confirms persistent systemic issues. The study contributes confirmatory evidence.

29. Methodological Rigor

The study employs a census survey design, enhancing representativeness. Instrument validity and reliability are well established. High response rate strengthens data credibility. Appropriate statistical tools are used. The methodology supports the robustness of findings. This rigor enhances reviewer confidence. The study demonstrates sound research practice.

30. Interpretation of Findings

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The interpretation of results is cautious and evidence-based. Contradictions between expected and actual practices are acknowledged. The discussion links findings to literature effectively. Explanations are plausible and grounded in context. This balanced interpretation strengthens academic quality. It avoids overgeneralization. The study maintains analytical integrity.

31. Conclusion on Strategy Implementation

The study concludes that optimal strategies are largely under-implemented. Despite policy intentions, practice lags behind. Multiple institutional and human factors contribute. This conclusion is logically derived from findings. It reflects a realistic assessment of the situation. The conclusion reinforces the research problem. It provides closure to the investigation.

32. Practical and Policy-Relevant Recommendations

The recommendations are actionable and context-specific. Emphasis is placed on technology use and industry-relevant teaching. Collaboration between universities and industry is strongly advocated. Lecturer training is prioritized. These recommendations address identified gaps. They offer guidance for policymakers and educators. The study thus makes a meaningful practical contribution.