

SECRETARIAL BUSINESS EDUCATION AND EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS AMONG BUSINESS EDUCATION GRADUATES

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Abstract

This study investigated the interplay between secretarial business education and employability skills among business education graduates. Employing a quantitative survey research design, the study sampled 150 postgraduate Business Education students from Olabisi Onabanjo University and Tai Solarin University of Education, using a stratified random sampling technique to ensure adequate representation of respondents. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire, named career readiness competencies, designed by the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE), covering key employability skills such as communication, problem-solving, digital literacy, and teamwork. The findings reveal that secretarial business education significantly foster employability skills, with a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.682$, $p < .05$). Specifically, graduates with secretarial business education experience demonstrated higher proficiency in digital literacy skill ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.79$) and communication skill ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.84$), compared to those without such experience.

Based on these findings, the study recommends, among others, that Business Education curricula incorporate secretarial business education and training to develop critical employability skills. Additionally, institutions should expand practical internship programmes and mentorship opportunities to further enhance career readiness. These measures will better equip graduates for the evolving demands of the job market, ultimately increasing their employability and career success.

Keyword: Career readiness, employability skills, secretarial business education, digital literacy skill, communication skill, problem-solving skill, teamwork skill.

Introduction

Career readiness is a fundamental aspect of workforce development, referring to the possession of skills, competencies, and attributes that enable graduates to transition smoothly into professional roles. As the global economy continues to evolve, career readiness has become an essential goal for educational institutions aiming to produce graduates who can meet the demands of modern workplaces. The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE, 2021) defines career readiness as a set of eight core competencies that ensure successful employment: communication, critical thinking, teamwork, digital literacy, leadership, professionalism, career management, and global/intercultural fluency. These competencies are seen as foundational elements that enable individuals to thrive in diverse professional environments.

Despite efforts by higher education institutions to integrate these competencies into curricula, there remains a persistent gap between academic training and the expectations of employers in various industries. Research has shown that Business Education graduates, despite earning degrees aligned with industry needs, often face challenges in demonstrating practical skills essential for workplace success

(Gyansah & Guantai, 2022). This misalignment is partly attributed to the theoretical nature of most

academic programs, which often provide limited exposure to real-world business operations. Consequently, many graduates struggle to demonstrate critical skills such as problem-solving, communication, and digital literacy, all of which are essential for career readiness.

The growing concern about graduates' unpreparedness has sparked significant discourse in educational research. According to Azih and Ejeka (2015), the gap between classroom instruction and workplace demands is widening, particularly in developing economies where educational institutions face resource limitations. Graduates may excel academically but often lack the ability to apply their knowledge in dynamic professional settings. This gap not only delays graduates' integration into the workforce but also contributes to high unemployment rates among university graduates (Abston & Soter, 2023). As industries increasingly demand adaptable, tech-savvy professionals with refined interpersonal skills, the urgency to bridge this gap has become more pressing.

One practical avenue for closing this gap is through secretarial business, a field that blends administrative, organizational, and communication tasks that directly develop critical employability competencies. Traditionally, secretarial business was seen as limited to clerical work, such as document preparation and filing. However, in contemporary settings, secretarial roles now encompass advanced skills such as digital literacy, customer relations, project coordination, and data management (Dosunmu et al., 2017). Secretarial business education provides hands-on training in workplace functions, allowing individuals to develop real-world competencies that align with NACE's career readiness framework. For example, secretarial business duties such as managing correspondence and coordinating meetings improve communication skills, while handling data entry and spreadsheet management strengthens digital literacy. Similarly, managing schedules, coordinating teams, and resolving workplace challenges foster teamwork and problem-solving capabilities (Villares & Brigman, 2018).

The transformation of modern workplaces has significantly expanded the scope of secretarial business education. Increasing reliance on digital tools and automation has elevated secretarial tasks from traditional clerical duties to include technical skills vital for contemporary business environments. Proficiency in word processing software, database management, and digital collaboration platforms is now crucial for individuals pursuing administrative roles (Musa & Reshi, 2024). The digital shift has also heightened the demand for professionals capable of managing virtual communication, cloud-based record systems, and project management tools. Consequently, individuals with secretarial business education experience often develop adaptable skills that align closely with the expectations of modern employers. These developments reinforce the value of secretarial business education as a practical means of fostering workplace readiness.

Several studies have demonstrated the positive impact of secretarial business education on employability outcomes. Ezechukwu et al. (2021) found that secretarial business education experience enhanced graduates' ability to secure employment by equipping them with practical skills such as office administration, document handling, and professional correspondence. Similarly, Oboreh and Nnebe (2019) reported that individuals with secretarial business education experience were better prepared to adapt to workplace demands due to their familiarity with organizational processes and customer relations. In a related study, Adeleke and Ojewale (2023) examined how entrepreneurship training in secretarial business education improved graduates' economic independence and business management skills. Their findings revealed that participants developed stronger financial management, decision-making, and customer service skills, all of which align with career readiness competencies. While previous research has highlighted the importance of secretarial business education in developing workplace skills, few studies have comprehensively explored its role in enhancing key competencies like communication, digital literacy, problem-solving, and teamwork, all essential for career readiness. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the extent to which secretarial business education experience influences these competencies.

This present study is anchored on the Experiential Learning Theory proposed by Kolb (1984), which emphasizes learning through practical experience. According to Kolb, individuals develop critical skills by actively engaging in real-world tasks, reflecting on their actions, and applying newly acquired insights. Secretarial business education offers a rich platform for this experiential learning, as individuals are immersed in activities that promote critical thinking, collaboration, and adaptability. Additionally, the present study also draws upon Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) developed by Lent, Brown and Hackett (1994). The SCCT emphasizes the influence of personal experiences and self-efficacy on career outcomes. In the context of secretarial business education, graduates' exposure to administrative responsibilities may strengthen their confidence and ability to manage professional challenges, ultimately enhancing their career readiness. The persistent skills gap among Business Education graduates highlights the urgent need for practical interventions that align academic knowledge with industry demands. While previous studies have explored general strategies for improving employability, limited attention has been given to the specific role of secretarial business education in fostering career readiness. By investigating this relationship, this study aims to provide valuable insights for educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers seeking to improve workforce preparedness.

Furthermore, as employers increasingly prioritize candidates with versatile skills such as digital literacy, effective communication, and teamwork, understanding the contribution of secretarial business education to these competencies is crucial. This study intends to provide empirical evidence on how secretarial business education engagement can equip Business Education graduates with the practical skills needed to excel in competitive job markets. This research will explore the relationship between secretarial business education experience and career readiness competencies. Specifically, the study seeks to determine whether engagement in secretarial business education enhances employability skills such as communication, digital literacy, problem-solving, and teamwork. The findings will contribute to ongoing discussions on workforce development and highlight the value of integrating secretarial business education and training into Business Education curricula. As workplace expectations evolve, career readiness has become an essential measure of graduate employability. Despite academic qualifications, many Business Education graduates lack the practical competencies required to transition into the workforce successfully. Secretarial business education serves as a critical training ground, equipping graduates with communication, digital literacy, problem-solving, and teamwork skills, all of which align with NACE's career readiness framework. This study seeks to explore the extent to which secretarial business education experience enhances career readiness competencies. By providing empirical insights into the relationship between administrative experience and employability, the study aims to inform educational policies, curriculum development, and workforce training initiatives.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing emphasis on employability skills, many Business Education graduates face difficulties in securing jobs due to a lack of practical competencies that align with industry expectations. While higher education institutions focus on theoretical knowledge, graduates often struggle with essential workplace skills such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and digital literacy. The disconnect between academic training and employer demands highlights the need for alternative career preparation methods. Secretarial business education, which involves administrative, managerial, and clerical tasks, has the potential to serve as an effective platform for developing employability competencies. However, there is limited research on how engagement in secretarial business education directly influences career readiness. This study, therefore, investigates the extent to which secretarial business education experience impacts employability skills among Business Education graduates, addressing the career readiness gap and proposing actionable solutions for curriculum improvement and workforce preparation.

Purpose of the Study

The objectives of this study are to examine:

1. the levels of employability skills among Business Education graduates.
2. the correlation between secretarial business education and employability skills.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: What is the levels of employability skills among Business Education graduates?

Research Question 2: What is the level of correlation between secretarial business education and employability skills?

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative survey research design to investigate the specific objectives of the study. The choice of this research design is justified by its ability to systematically collect and analyse data from a defined population, allowing for an objective assessment of relationships between variables (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This type of research design provides a quantitative approach to evaluating career readiness by capturing perceptions, skills acquisition, and professional experiences among graduates. Given that the study seeks to understand the extent to which secretarial business influences employability skills, this approach ensures data-driven insights that can be generalized within the study population. Additionally, quantitative surveys are efficient in gathering large volumes of data while maintaining statistical reliability (Bryman, 2016).

Population and Sampling Procedure

The population for this study comprised of postgraduate Business Education students from two institutions, namely: Olabisi Onabanjo University and Tai Solarin University of Education, both in Ogun State, Nigeria. These institutions were chosen because of their well-established Business Education Programmes that produce graduates with varying levels of exposure to secretarial business competencies. A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure a representative sample across different demographics, particularly gender and institutional affiliation. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) formula for determining appropriate sample sizes for a finite population. Based on this approach, a total of 150 postgraduate Business Education students were selected, ensuring a balance between male and female participants. Stratified sampling was adopted to control for potential variations in secretarial business experience and career readiness levels among respondents. By doing so, the study aimed to achieve more reliable and valid findings that reflect the diversity within the Business Education student population.

Research Instrument

Data were collected using a Secretarial Business and Career Readiness Questionnaire, a structured instrument designed to measure the level of correlation between secretarial business education and employability skills. The questionnaire consisted of 25 items categorized into four major clusters, namely: communication skill, digital literacy skill, problem-solving skill, and teamwork skill. Respondents were asked to rate their proficiency in these areas based on their engagement in secretarial business competencies.

Validation and Reliability of Instrument

The instrument was subjected to expert validation and pilot testing among 20 postgraduate students of Business Education, who were not included in the final study. A reliability test was performed

using Cronbach's alpha, which yielded a coefficient value of 0.88, indicating strong internal consistency measure.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the responses related to levels of employability skills among business education students. Pearson's Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) was employed to assess the strength and direction of the correlation between secretarial business education and employability skills. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$ to determine meaningful associations between variables. The analysis was conducted using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 26.0, ensuring robust and reliable data interpretation.

Result

Research Question 1: What is the levels of employability skills among Business Education graduates?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation on the Levels of Employability Skills Among Business Education Graduates.

S/N	Employability Skills	Mean	SD
1.	Communication	3.76	0.84
2.	Digital Literacy	3.89	0.79
3.	Problem-Solving	3.65	0.87
4.	Teamwork	3.80	0.82

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of the levels of employability skills among respondents. The highest-rated skill was digital literacy skill ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 0.79$), suggesting that secretarial business education engagements strongly enhance technical proficiency. Communication skill ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.84$) were also well-developed, reflecting the nature of administrative tasks that require consistent interaction with clients and colleagues. Problem-solving skill ($M = 3.65$, $SD = 0.87$) and teamwork skill ($M = 3.80$, $SD = 0.82$) showed relatively high scores, supporting prior research by Villares and Brigman (2024), which emphasized that administrative work skill fosters adaptability and collaborative efficiency.

Research Question 2: What is the level of correlation between secretarial business education and employability skills?

Table 2: Pearson's Correlation between Secretarial Business Education and Employability Skills.

S/N	Variable	r-value	p-value
1.	Secretarial Business Education	0.682	<0.05
2.	Employability Skills		

Table 2 shows the level of correlation between secretarial business education and employability skills. The strong positive correlation ($r = 0.682$, $p < .05$), which indicates that increased engagement in secretarial business education significantly enhances employability skills. This finding aligns with previous studies (Musa & Reshi, 2024) who emphasized the role of vocational experiences in fostering workplace preparedness. The statistical significance suggests that secretarial business education plays a pivotal role in equipping Business Education graduates with competencies required in modern work environments.

Discussion

The findings of this study reinforce the argument that secretarial business education serves as an effective platform for developing employability skills among Business Education graduates. The strong positive correlation ($r = 0.682$, $p < 0.05$) between secretarial business education and employability skills confirms that graduates who engage in administrative functions acquire essential workplace competencies that improve their employability. This supports previous studies of Abston and Soter (2023), who emphasize the role of practical vocational training in preparing graduates for employment. Similarly, the result aligns with the study of Gyansah and Guantai (2022), who found that students with real-world administrative experience demonstrated higher levels of workplace readiness than their peers who relied solely on academic instruction. The study identified digital literacy and communication skills as the most enhanced competencies among graduates who participated in secretarial business. This is consistent with Dosunmu, Bukki, and Akintola (2017), who reported that office-based tasks such as document preparation, record management, and digital correspondence significantly improve individuals' technical and verbal communication abilities.

The findings revealed that graduates who engaged in secretarial business demonstrated a high level of digital proficiency. This is likely due to the increasing reliance on office productivity software, cloud-based document management, and digital communication tools in administrative roles (Musa & Reshi, 2024). These results are particularly relevant in today's digital-driven work environment, where employers prioritize candidates with strong technological capabilities. However, while digital literacy ranked highest, it was observed that some graduates struggled with more advanced data management and automation tools, indicating the need for expanded training in specialized software such as enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems and customer relationship management (CRM) platforms.

The study also found that communication skills were significantly improved among graduates engaged in secretarial business. Administrative duties such as handling correspondence, preparing reports, and managing client interactions provided opportunities for students to develop both written and verbal communication skills. This finding is supported by Villares and Brigman (2024), who identified communication proficiency as a key career readiness indicator that enhances workplace efficiency. The results also align with Oboreh and Nnebe (2019), who found that graduates with prior administrative experience were more confident in interacting with colleagues, clients, and senior executives. However, the study suggests that while secretarial business improves fundamental communication skills, public speaking and advanced negotiation skills were less frequently developed, indicating the need for additional training in interpersonal and leadership communication.

Interestingly, problem-solving skills ranked lower than digital literacy and communication skills, suggesting that while secretarial business fosters general workplace competencies, additional training in critical thinking and independent decision-making may be necessary. This finding is partially consistent with Azih and Ejeka (2015), who noted that many administrative roles involve repetitive tasks, which may not always challenge individuals to engage in high-level decision-making.

The study found that while graduates were proficient in following established procedures, they struggled with handling unexpected challenges independently. This suggests that traditional secretarial tasks may not always provide the complexity needed to build advanced problem-solving capabilities. Furthermore, problem-solving competencies are often context-dependent. Graduates in environments where secretarial duties involve critical decision-making, scheduling conflicts, or customer service challenges were observed to have higher problem-solving scores than those engaged in routine administrative work. Given these observations, Business Education programs should consider incorporating case-based learning, simulation exercises, and real-world administrative challenges to enhance graduates' critical thinking abilities. The implications of these findings are significant for Business Education curriculum design, as they highlight the need for structured hands-on training that bridges the gap between theoretical learning and workplace skill acquisition. To optimize career readiness, Business Education programs must integrate secretarial business training into their coursework. This can

be achieved through:

- Applied learning modules that require students to perform administrative tasks in simulated office settings.
- Technology-focused training to improve proficiency in office automation, digital communication, and database management.
- Real-world problem-solving exercises to develop critical thinking and adaptability.

Institutions should strengthen internship programs and mentorship initiatives, enabling students to apply secretarial competencies in real-world scenarios before graduation. Research by Ezechukwu et al. (2021) found that students who completed internships in administrative roles had higher employability rates than those who relied solely on coursework. Thus, universities should:

- Partner with organizations to provide structured internship placements.
- Encourage shadowing experiences where students observe and learn from industry professionals.
- Develop mentorship programs that allow students to gain insights into workplace dynamics and career expectations.

The study also revealed that graduates involved in secretarial business often pursued self-employment or freelance administrative work, highlighting entrepreneurial potential in this field. Given this trend, Business Education curricula should:

- Incorporate business management training to help students establish and manage their own administrative support services.
- Provide financial literacy programs to enhance their ability to budget, market, and sustain small businesses.
- Encourage networking with industry professionals, equipping students with strategies to market themselves as administrative consultants or virtual assistants.

The findings of this study align with the Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), who emphasizes learning through real-world engagement. Graduates who actively participated in secretarial business gained first-hand experience in key workplace functions, reinforcing Kolb's assertion that hands-on tasks facilitate deeper learning and skill retention. Additionally, the results support the Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), who highlights the role of self-efficacy in career preparedness. By engaging in secretarial business education, graduates developed confidence in their professional abilities, strengthening their readiness to transition into the workforce.

Conclusion

The study confirms that secretarial business education plays a critical role in career readiness by enhancing digital literacy, communication, and workplace adaptability. However, problem-solving skills require additional reinforcement through complex administrative challenges and decision-making exercises. For optimal workforce preparation, Business Education programmes must enhance practical training, strengthen internship opportunities, and incorporate entrepreneurial education. These interventions will better align academic programs with industry expectations, ultimately improving graduates' employment prospects in competitive job markets.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made:

1. Curriculum Enhancement: Business Education programs should incorporate practical secretarial business training modules.
2. Internships and Apprenticeships: Universities should establish strong partnerships with industries to provide students with real-world administrative experience.
3. Mentorship and Professional Development: Students should be exposed to mentorship programs that enhance problem-solving and leadership skills.

4. Continuous Research: Further studies should explore the long-term career trajectories of Business Education graduates who engaged in secretarial business to assess the sustainability of these skills.

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