

Work-Based Learning and School-to-Work Transition among Business Education Students in Universities in Cross River State

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Abstract

This study adopted a predictive correlational research design to investigate the predictive relationship between work-based learning and school-to-work transition among business education students in universities in Cross River State. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. The population comprised 703 business education graduating students from four universities in Cross River State, of whom a sample of 268 was drawn using the simple random sampling technique. A 30-item questionnaire titled Work-Based Learning and School-to-Work Transition Questionnaire (WBLSTWTQ) was developed by the researchers and validated by five experts comprising two from Measurement and Evaluation and three from Business Education in the University of Calabar. The WBLSTWTQ was tested for reliability, and the data obtained were analysed using Cronbach's Alpha statistics, which produced the reliability index of 0.87. The data collected were analysed using the linear regression analysis to answer the research questions and test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. Findings indicated that career mentoring and placement-based learning significantly predict school-to-work transition among business education students in universities in Cross River State. Based

on the findings, the study recommends that business education students should leverage career mentoring to facilitate their integration into the labour market.

Keywords: Work-based learning, school-to-work transition, business education, students, Cross River State

Introduction

People learn from several sources. One such source is the workplace. Work-based learning is a subset of hands-on education. Work-based learning, as defined by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2023), encompasses all forms of learning that take place in a real-world work setting and give people the abilities required to seek and retain employment and advance professionally. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2023) define work-based learning as learning that occurs through a combination of school and work-based programmes in which learners acquire technical and soft skills directly in the workplace. However, within the slightly limited boundaries of vocational education and training, job-based learning refers to learning that occurs via actual work, the production of real goods and services, whether paid or unpaid. Job-based learning is thus an educational technique that gives students real-life job experiences in which they can apply academic and technical abilities and improve their employability (Bolli et al., 2021). It provides them with both generic and specific abilities, connects them with industry specialists, familiarises them with workplace circumstances, and increases their competitiveness in the job market.

The potential of work-based learning (WBL), which includes learning in the workplace through internships, apprenticeships, informal learning on the job, cooperative education, practicum experience, field placement, clinical placement, on-the-job training, career mentorship, placement-based learning, and other vocational-specific curricula, to ease the shift from school to work, guarantee that training is in line with labour market demands, offer opportunities for the continuous development of skills that are transferable to meet the demands of the evolving working environment, and assist students to comprehend and adjust to the realities of the workplace (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2021; International Labour Organization, 2022; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2021). Work-based learning has shown promise as a model for linking schooling to work preparation, improving positive student attitudes, academic motivation, and goal articulation for school and career, and providing young people with intellectual and non-cognitive work-ready abilities for transitioning from educational institutions into meaningful work and life (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Holzer & Lerman, 2021; Symonds et al., 2021; Organization for Economic Co-

operation and Development, 2021; International Labour Organization, 2022). Thus, by giving young people the chance to apply theory in real-world situations, work-based learning programmes might potentially supplement the academic learning environment to enhance personal, social, and career preparation competences (Ortega-Sánchez et al., 2020).

Collaborative ties between schools and universities, learners, employers, and industry-related experts are essential to the success of WBL programmes (Ferns et al., 2020). In order to facilitate more relevant educational experiences, learners' job experience must be in line with the curricular requirements, making academic and industry cooperation an essential aspect of this framework (Ortega-Sánchez et al., 2020). This approach facilitates effective communication based on trustworthy relationships, clearly stated expectations, and coordinated operations (Jackson, 2017; Putra et al., 2022) that not only prepare young adults to make significant contributions to society but also facilitate their smooth transition from school to the workforce.

Transitioning from full-time Higher Education (HE) activities to full-time employment is known as the school-to-work transition (Baluku et al., 2021). According to de Oliveira et al. (2016), being prepared for school-to-work transition (STWT) has been defined as a process that includes leaving school and creating occupational identities, participating in a preparatory and active search for employment, rearranging one's experiences that may improve job finding, researching the policies and procedures of possible future employers, comprehending workplace expectations, assessing how well people fit into the selected career paths, and developing pertinent skills and identifying career targets. Young folks' move from higher education to the workforce is a significant time in their lives, and one of the most essential things students can do is prepare for this shift (Parmentier et al., 2022). Because there is no longer a single linear career route in the modern labour market, students must be ready to handle challenges and unforeseen circumstances (Marciniak et al., 2022) and manage their careers (Akkermans & Tims, 2017). This time is marked by a high level of uncertainty, and people are transitioning from the established education setting to the still-unknown labour market context (Grosemans & Kyndt, 2017). The preparation phase of the transition process begins for learners, identifying their goals and objectives in order to prepare for the future. Additionally, students must make several professional decisions at this phase for the first time (like the kind of occupation, type of organisation, type of employment, form of employment, and continuity of employment) (De Vos et al., 2019).

In order to potentially develop a sustainable career, this first major job move sets a precedent for subsequent career shifts (Akkermans & Tims, 2017; De Vos et al., 2019; Zacher & Froidevaux, 2021). On the other hand, studies regularly show that an unsuccessful beginning in the job market can have a negative and long-lasting effect on subsequent life outcomes and future career advancement. This is due to the fact that our initial job experiences frequently influence how people view work in the future. If they are unfavourable, it will be difficult to change this initial impression. Unfortunately, for many young adults in Nigeria and many areas of Cross River State, this initial impression is shaped by unfulfilled expectations, a lack of acceptable and respectable employment, drawn-out bureaucratic processes, and a fruitless job hunt. The occupations that are found frequently do not add up to much. Short-term employment contracts, offers from the shadow business sector, poor and unpredictable compensation packages, little access to further training options, in addition to a mismatch between higher education preparation and work skill requirements. According to Karaca-Atik et al. (2023), this disparity leads to underemployment and unemployment among graduates and skills mismatch in a variety of countries. According to Hughes and Davis (2024), graduates often lack the communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills that organisations consistently rank as key professional talents. This limits early career growth and increases organisational training expenses. As a means of bridging academic learning and workplace preparedness, career mentorship programmes and placement-based learning are being suggested more and more (Penman et al., 2024; Lukashe et al., 2024).

Career mentoring in higher education, according to Nuis and Beausaert (2020), is a systematic, formal procedure built on a mutually beneficial coach-coachee engagement. Coaching sessions are frequently provided as individual sessions in the context of higher learning. In addition to teaching members, students might receive guidance in their academic progress from more seasoned classmates or graduates. To encourage the coachee's academic growth, a variety of supportive behaviours are required. Getting advice and support from mentors is crucial for career preparation and growth, particularly in academia, where access to resources and employment prospects is getting harder. Mentors impart their knowledge, experience, subject-matter expertise, and networks to mentees to offer suggestions and criticism, spot and open possibilities, handle issues and prevent errors, and, most importantly, help with assessing the various personal and professional aspects involved in choosing a career path and a job.

A crucial component of a successful career path is finding, interacting with, and using mentors appropriately. Successful mentorship can come from a variety of sources, such as

interpersonal relationships, passive role models, artificial intelligence, teachers, supervisors, senior colleagues, and leaders who are interested in creating a highly interactive counselling relationship to support their mentees' development both professionally and personally and career success. Together with mentors from different fields, these mentors, who are frequently subject-matter experts, offer direction and assistance with professional activities, career decision-making, and handling challenges and opportunities. Additionally, they help mentees assess behaviour and accomplishments, develop self-awareness and confidence, think about new ideas, and create realistic objectives, priorities, and expectations by using their knowledge, skills, talents, and experience. Additionally, mentors can be especially beneficial for individuals getting ready to enter the fields of accounting, management, marketing, entrepreneurship, and office administration. They use their connections and influence to support, sponsor, recommend, and provide references for their mentees (Bonifacino et al., 2021; Farkas et al., 2019; Shen et al., 2022; Undie et al., 2023).

The employment of mentors to help youngsters learn about and explore jobs from an early age, as well as transition into work environments as they go from youth into young adulthood, is becoming more and more valuable in today's environment. Up to 5 million American adults mentor a young person at work or as part of a career exploration programme annually, according to MENTOR (2014) research. Additionally, it is becoming increasingly acknowledged that early-stage workers can benefit greatly from mentors in employment development and job training courses, which can improve career placement as well as retention results. Nearly 90 per cent of these mentored young adults were kept in their jobs for more than 90 days, a significant increase over previous retention averages, according to a study by Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (MDRC) (2016) on mentoring partnerships within employment development settings for young adults. According to the same study, 72 per cent of those surveyed said their mentors assisted them in deciding what to do next in their academic or professional endeavours.

Another tactic that can help graduates integrate into the workforce is placement-based learning. According to Jones et al. (2017), placement-based learning is a structured job experience course in which universities work with businesses or industries to give learners exposure to real-world work environments and improved comprehension of everyday activities. Learners may be better prepared for STWT if placement-based learning exposes them to a variety of employment-related opportunities, such as attending professional development seminars, participating in job hunt preparatory behaviours, forming career connections with potential employers, or making decisions about future careers (Caspersen & Smeby, 2020; Inceoglu et al., 2019; Okorie et al., 2022; Smith & Hodge, 2019).

Placement-based learning generally aims to let learners learn by doing, by fusing classroom instruction with practical experiences (Arthur et al., 2022). Direct interaction, immersive learning activities, and students' creation of meaning are some of the ways in which this is accomplished. Beyond its main objectives, studies reveal that workplace learning significantly increases involvement with real-world abilities (Chukwuedo & Ementa, 2022), fosters concrete learning behaviours (Brewer et al., 2022), and increases perceived employability (Otache & Edopkolor, 2022) and productivity (Bolli et al., 2021). Furthermore, WPL has been shown to improve career development (Hill et al., 2022), encourage entrepreneurial behaviours (Lantu et al., 2022), and improve work readiness (Kapareliotis et al., 2019). There are few empirical results about how WPL might improve students' preparedness for STWT among business education students, even though earlier WPL investigations have concentrated more on the relationship between WPL and career certainty, skills acquisition, competitiveness, job hunting, and better performance in school (Crawford & Wang, 2016; Okolie et al., 2022; Okorie et al., 2022). Therefore, the goal of this work is to close this theoretical and empirical gap in the literature.

The researchers have seen that a lot of students have trouble making the shift from school to the workplace. These include concerns about job fit and how students obtain the skills they need to adjust to the changing industry and keep improving (Winterton & Turner, 2019). Graduates frequently struggle to adjust to this new environment because they feel unprepared to handle the expectations of work environments (Grosemans & Kyndt, 2017). Numerous universities in several nations, including Switzerland, Germany, Singapore, and the Netherlands, have made investments in the WPL programme (Holzer & Lerman, 2021; Okolie et al., 2021) to give students a variety of prior work experiences, skills, and abilities to improve their preparedness for STWT (Inceoglu et al., 2019; Okorie et al., 2022). Despite these investments, many higher education institutions that offer business education still face intricate challenges that hinder their ability to provide training that is in line with the demands of the modern workforce, despite being widely recognised for their important role in giving people the practical abilities and expertise they need to enhance their likelihood of obtaining jobs and making a positive impact on the nation's economy. This helps to explain why companies still find a discrepancy between the skills needed in the industry and preparation from higher education. This is the context in which this investigation was carried out.

Research questions

The following questions guided the study:

1. To what extent does career mentorship predict the school-to-work transition among business education students?
2. To what extent does placement-based learning predict the school-to-work transition among business education students?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses guided the study:

Ho1: Career mentorship does not significantly predict school-to-work transition among business education students.

Ho2: Placement-based learning does not significantly predict school-to-work transition among business education students.

Methodology

This study adopted the predictive correlation research design. This design was considered appropriate for this research because the study investigated the predictive relationship between work-based learning and school-to-work transition. This design also informed the choice of simple linear regression analysis. The study population was 703 business education graduating students from four universities in Cross River State; the choice of which was informed by the fact that they were close to transitioning from school to the world of work. A sample of 268, representing 38 per cent of the population, was drawn from the study population using the hat and draw method of the simple random sampling technique. In applying this method, the researchers wrote the names of the elements of the population in each university on pieces of paper, folded them, and put them in a container. The researchers blindly picked the first 20 papers from the container and recorded the already picked papers, after which they were returned to the container to give every element of the population an equal and independent chance of being selected without bias. This process continued until 268 respondents were selected as the sample.

A 30-item questionnaire titled Work-Based Learning and School-to-Work Transition Questionnaire (WBLSTWTQ) was developed by the researchers on a five-point scale of very great extent (VGE) - 5 points, Great Extent (GE) -4 points, moderate extent (ME) - 3 points, little extent (LE) - 2 points and very little extent (VLE) - 1point. It was validated by five experts comprising two from Measurement and Evaluation and three from Business Education, all from the University of Calabar. The experts in Measurement and Evaluation face-validated the WBLSTWTQ, while those in Business Education performed the content validity. The WBLSTWTQ was tested for reliability by administering it to respondents in

universities in Akwa Ibom State who were outside the study area but possessed similar attributes with the study population. Data obtained were analysed using Cronbach's Alpha statistics, which produced the reliability index of 0.87, indicating that the instrument was reliable and therefore measured what it was designed to measure consistently. The questionnaire was administered using the hand delivery method, and the data collected were analysed using the linear regression analysis to answer the research questions and also test the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. For the null hypotheses, a null hypothesis was retained if the P-value was $\geq .05$ level of significance, but if the P-value was $\leq .05$ level of significance, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Presentation of results

Research question 1: To what extent does career mentorship predict the school-to-work transition among business education students?

Table 1: Beta (β) and adjusted R^2 on the extent to which career mentorship predicts school-to-work transition among business education students in universities in Cross River State

Model	B	SE	R^2	Adjusted R^2
1	.705	3.16208	.497	.496

The results in Table 1 show the extent to which career mentorship predicts school-to-work transition among business education students in universities in Cross River State, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.496. This indicates that career mentorship accounts for 49.6 per cent of the variance, which is a low determinant of school-to-work transition among business education students. Additionally, the Beta value of 0.705, which measures the effect size or strength of the relationship between the variables, reveals that career mentorship contributes 70.5 per cent to the effect, indicating a high prediction of school-to-work transition among business education students in universities in Cross River State.

H₀₁: Career mentorship does not significantly predict the school-to-work transition among business education students.

Table 2: Linear regression showing the prediction of school-to-work transition among business education students by career mentorship

Model	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	p-value
Regression	3604.404	1	3604.404	360.485	.000 ^b
Residual	3649.547	365	9.999		
Total	7253.951	366			
Variables	Unstandardized coefficient	B Std. error	Standardised coefficient (B)	T	P-value
(Constant)	50.040	.946	.705	52.897	.000
Creer mentorship	1.202	0.63		18.986	.000

The results in Table 2 show that the p-value (.000) associated with the computed F-value (360.485) was less than .05. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that career mentorship significantly predicts school-to-work transition among business education students, with both the regression constant (50.040) and coefficient (1.202) contributing significantly in the prediction model ($t = 52.897$ & 18.986 , respectively, $p = .000$ & $.000 < .05$).

Research question 2: To what extent does placement-based learning predict the school-to-work transition among business education students?

Table 3: Beta (β) and adjusted R^2 on the extent to which placement-based learning predicts school-to-work transition among business education students in universities in Cross River State

Model	B	SE	R^2	Adjusted R^2
1	.748	2.96043	.559	.448

The results in Table 3 show the extent to which placement-based learning predicts school-to-work transition among business education students in universities in Cross River State, with an adjusted R^2 of 0.448. This indicates that placement-based learning accounts for 44.8 per cent of the variance, which is a low determinant of school-to-work transition among business education students. Additionally, the Beta value of 0.748, which measures the effect size or strength of the relationship between the variables, reveals that placement-based learning contributes 74.8 per cent to the effect, indicating a high prediction of school-to-work transition among business education students in universities in Cross River State.

Ho2: Placement-based learning does not significantly predict school-to-work transition among business education students.

Table 4: Linear regression showing the prediction of school-to-work transition among business education students by placement-based learning

Model	Sum of square	Df	Mean square	F	p-value
Regression	4055.032	1	4055.032	462.683	.000 ^b
Residual	3198.919	365	8.764		
Total	7253.951	366			
Variables	Unstandardized coefficient	B std. error	Standardised coefficient (B)	T	p-value
(Constant)	53.601	1.000	.748	53.613	.000
Placement-based learning	1.435	.067		21.510	.000

The results in Table 4 show that the p-value (.000) associated with the computed F-value (462.683) was less than .05. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that placement-based learning does significantly predict school-to-work transition among business education students in universities in Cross River State, with both the regression constant (53.601) and coefficient (1.435) contributing significantly in the prediction model ($t = 53.613$ & 21.510 , respectively, $p = .000$ & $.000 < .05$).

Discussion of the findings

The testing of the first hypothesis indicates that career mentoring significantly predicts school-to-work transition among business education students in universities in Cross River State. This study's findings are consistent with those of other scholars, who have found that WPL improves perceived career prospects (Otache & Edopkolor, 2022), and performance (Bolli et al., 2021), increases participation with functional abilities (Chukwuedo & Ementa, 2022), and fosters hands-on learning behaviours (Brewer et al., 2022). Furthermore, WPL has been shown to improve work readiness (Kapareliotis et al., 2019), promote entrepreneurial behaviours (Lantu et al., 2022), and enable professional development (Hill et al., 2022). Since mentorship entails developing a trustworthy relationship between the mentor and the mentee, which aims not only at the transfer of experience and expertise but also at fostering a sense of autonomy in the workplace, enhancing proficiency in communication, recognition and development of the mentee's strengths, boosting self-worth, psychological guidance, boosting capacity for resilience,

and career advancement, the results of this study may be as reported. One important strategy for enhancing graduation prospects is career coaching. As students traverse the early phases of their careers, it can give them connections to sectors and an opportunity to network with professionals.

The testing of the second hypothesis indicates that placement-based learning significantly predicts school-to-work transition among business education students in universities in Cross River State. The finding of this study aligns with MENTOR (2014), which discovered that mentoring can be a valuable asset to young-career individuals, improving employment prospects as well as retention results. The findings of this study are congruent with those of Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation (2016), which found that over 90 per cent of guided young adults were retained in their occupations for more than 90 days, a significant increase above previous retention statistics. According to the same poll, 72 per cent of those surveyed said their mentors assisted them in deciding what to do next in their careers or studies. This result may be as reported since work-based learning helps students prepare for the reality of a job and enables them to determine whether their chosen vocation is good for them. Even when applying for entry-level positions, individuals can show that they have relevant job experience thanks to work-based learning, which provides practical training and puts them in a better position than others. Learning in the workplace combines theory and actual labour, in contrast to classroom education, which places a strong emphasis on theory. Students gain from an active, practice-based education based on cutting-edge research that gives them the information and abilities they need to find employment after graduation. Students must obtain excellent on-the-job experience through work placement in order to advance their abilities and adapt to a dynamic workplace.

Conclusion

Through work-based learning opportunities, students in higher education institutions can build experiential learning in potentially interesting occupations while gaining vital practical skills that make them more prepared for the workforce. Students in a range of academic subjects have access to WBL programmes that help them develop their skills not only in job development but also in intellectual, social, and emotional domains because IHEs frequently have strong ties with local businesses. Many of these advantages come from the processes and activities that students go through when they participate in WBL, such as their interactions with employers, their involvement in multidisciplinary and collaborative work, their ability to think critically and solve problems, and their practical application of what they learn in the classroom. Students who take part in WBL expand

their perspectives and open doors to prospects that promote economic mobility by gaining important mentorship and supervision from educational and professional leaders.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

1. Business education students should leverage career mentoring to facilitate their integration into the labour market.
2. Business educators should encourage experiential learning and placement-based learning to facilitate the transition of business education students to the world of work.

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