



Skills-Based Education Practices and Perceived Employability Competence among Final-Year Undergraduates in Three State-Owned Universities in Ondo State, Nigeria: Lessons from the United Kingdom

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Received: 18 July 2026 • Accepted: 9 October 2026 • Published: 17 October 2026

ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between skills-based education practices and perceived employability competence among final-year undergraduates in three state-owned universities in Ondo State, Nigeria, while drawing comparative lessons from the United Kingdom. A descriptive survey and correlational design were used. Data were obtained from 460 final-year students selected through multistage sampling using the Skill-Based Education Practices and Graduate Employability Questionnaire. Descriptive statistics, Pearson product-moment correlation and multiple regression were used. Documentary analysis was used for the United Kingdom component. Skills-based education practices were significantly and positively related to perceived employability competence ($r = .695$, $p < .001$). The six dimensions jointly explained 61.9% of the variance in perceived employability competence ($R = .786$, $R^2 = .619$, adjusted $R^2 = .614$), $F(6, 453) = 122.87$, $p < .001$. Work-based learning ($\beta = .272$), university-industry collaboration ($\beta = .230$), vocational and technical skills training ($\beta = .145$), practical/project-based learning ($\beta = .136$), and entrepreneurship education ($\beta = .122$) made significant positive contributions. Career guidance and employability training had a positive but non-significant unique contribution ($\beta = .101$, $p = .189$). The findings indicate the need to strengthen structured workplace learning, employer engagement, practical training and entrepreneurship while improving career development provision. UK practices provide useful principles, but adaptation to Nigerian institutional and labour-market conditions is necessary.

Keywords: Skills-Based Education; Perceived Employability Competence; Work-Based Learning; University-Industry Collaboration; Vocational Education; United Kingdom

Cite this article: Allen, T., & Ogunbadejo, O. (2026). Skills-based education practices and perceived employability competence among final-year undergraduates in three state-owned universities in Ondo State, Nigeria: Lessons from the United Kingdom. *African Journal of Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 16(8), 2389–2396. <https://doi.org/10.68442/ajsbs/2026/v16i8.003>

Introduction

The changing nature of work has increased pressure on universities to prepare graduates for more than academic attainment. Employers increasingly require combinations of disciplinary knowledge, practical competence, digital capability, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, adaptability and initiative. This has made graduate employability an important consideration in judging the relevance of higher education, while contemporary vocational education similarly emphasises the combination of technical knowledge, practical skills and broader competencies (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2024).

In Nigeria, a university degree does not necessarily translate into a smooth transition to employment or effective workplace performance. Studies have identified concerns about skills mismatch, weak university-industry relationships, inadequate infrastructure, outdated curriculum content and limited opportunities for students to apply academic knowledge in authentic settings (Nwajiuba et al., 2020;

Ogunode et al., 2023). The concern is therefore not only whether students acquire knowledge, but whether university education enables them to convert that knowledge into competencies useful in employment and professional practice.

Skills-based education provides one response to this challenge by integrating knowledge, application and demonstration of competence. In this study, it is examined through six dimensions: work-based learning; university–industry collaboration; vocational and technical skills training; entrepreneurship education; practical/project-based learning; and career guidance and employability training. Work-based learning connects classroom concepts with occupational tasks, while university–industry collaboration can provide curriculum input, mentoring, projects, placements and exposure to employer expectations (Chukwuedo & Ementa, 2022; Jackson & Dean, 2023). Vocational and technical training, entrepreneurship education, practical projects and career guidance further extend employability preparation beyond conventional academic learning (Egeonu & Omeje, 2024; Pitan & Atiku, 2017).

The United Kingdom offers a useful comparative reference because its skills system connects education, employers, occupational standards, workplace learning and progression through differentiated routes. Apprenticeships combine employment with structured learning, while T Levels (technical qualifications with substantial industry placement) and higher technical routes provide additional links between education and work (Department for Education, 2024). The comparison is not intended to suggest direct transplantation because Nigeria and the United Kingdom differ in institutional capacity, funding, labour-market structure and educational traditions. Instead, it identifies principles that may be adaptable to Nigeria.

Against this background, the study examined skills-based education practices and perceived employability competence among final-year undergraduates in three state-owned universities in Ondo State and considered lessons from selected UK education and vocational training practices.

Statement of the Problem

The expansion of higher education in Nigeria has increased the number of graduates entering the labour market, but concerns remain about whether university education consistently develops the practical and transferable competencies required by employers. A student may complete several years of academic study yet have limited experience applying knowledge to real workplace tasks, using contemporary technologies, solving unfamiliar problems, working in teams or communicating professional value to employers.

The problem is reflected in weak or inconsistent university–industry collaboration, limited workplace experience, insufficient practical and project-based learning, inadequate career development, an emphasis on conventional examinations, and the need to strengthen entrepreneurship and digital capabilities. Although Nigeria has initiatives relating to industrial training, entrepreneurship, technical and vocational education and skills qualifications, implementation within mainstream university education remains uneven (Joshua & Adeyinka, 2026; Nwajiuba et al., 2020). Empirical evidence is therefore needed on the relationship between skills-based education practices and perceived employability competence within specific university settings.

Literature Review

Graduate employability is a multidimensional outcome involving the ability to apply disciplinary knowledge, demonstrate transferable skills, adapt to changing work demands and navigate the transition into employment. Nigerian studies have linked employability to curriculum relevance, industry engagement, practical learning and career development (Attah et al., 2026; Ore, 2023).

Work-based learning connects academic learning with occupational practice. Evidence on work placement and work-integrated learning indicates that structured experiential opportunities can contribute to employability skills (Chukwuedo & Ementa, 2022; Jackson & Dean, 2023). University–industry collaboration extends this connection through employer participation in curriculum review, mentoring, projects, placements and professional engagement. Nigerian research continues to call for

stronger institutional partnerships and stakeholder involvement (Attah et al., 2026; Nwajiuba et al., 2020; Otache, 2022).

Entrepreneurship, technical skills and career development broaden the employability agenda beyond preparation for conventional salaried employment. Entrepreneurship education can support initiative, opportunity recognition and enterprise-related competencies, while technical learning develops occupational capabilities. Career guidance can help students understand occupations, qualifications, recruitment processes and career pathways (Egeonu & Omeje, 2024; Pitan & Atiku, 2017).

The UK literature and policy context provides a comparative benchmark because employer engagement, occupational standards, workplace learning and progression are more explicitly connected across parts of the skills system. The present study uses this evidence as documentary policy learning rather than as evidence from a second respondent population.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine skills-based education practices and perceived employability competence among final-year undergraduates in three state-owned universities in Ondo State, with comparative lessons from the United Kingdom.

Specifically, the study sought to:

- determine the extent to which practical and experiential components of skills-based education are implemented;
- examine the extent of university–industry collaboration;
- determine the relationship between skills-based education practices and perceived employability competence;
- examine the contributions of the six skills-based education dimensions to perceived employability competence; and
- identify relevant lessons from UK education and vocational training practices for Nigeria.

Research Questions

1. To what extent are work-based learning, vocational and technical skills training, entrepreneurship education, practical/project-based learning, and career guidance and employability training implemented in the three state-owned universities in Ondo State?
2. What is the extent of university–industry collaboration in the three state-owned universities in Ondo State?

Hypotheses

H₀1: There is no significant relationship between skills-based education practices and perceived employability competence among final-year undergraduate students in the three state-owned universities in Ondo State.

H₀2: Work-based learning, university–industry collaboration, vocational and technical skills training, entrepreneurship education, practical/project-based learning, and career guidance and employability training do not significantly predict perceived employability competence among final-year undergraduate students in the three state-owned universities in Ondo State.

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey and correlational design. The descriptive component examined the reported extent of skills-based education practices and university–industry collaboration, while the correlational component examined the relationship between the composite skills-based education measure and perceived employability competence and estimated the predictive contributions of six dimensions.

The study focused on final-year undergraduate students in the three state-owned universities in Ondo State, Nigeria. A sample of 460 students was selected through multistage sampling. The three universities were selected as the institutional setting; faculties and departments were sampled to provide disciplinary representation, and students were selected from available final-year lists using proportionate allocation and simple random procedures. The analysis was based on 460 usable responses.

Data were collected with the researcher-developed Skill-Based Education Practices and Graduate Employability Questionnaire (SBEPGEQ). Section A was used to collect demographic data of the respondent, while Section B measured the six dimensions of skills-based education practices, and Section C measured perceived employability competence. The questionnaire used a four-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). Expert face and content validation and a pilot study were undertaken. The reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranged from .72 to .87 across the reported sections/dimensions. A criterion mean of 2.50 was used for descriptive interpretation. Pearson product-moment correlation tested H_{01} and multiple regression tested H_{02} at the .05 significance level.

The UK component used documentary analysis rather than primary data. Academic and policy documents on apprenticeships, work placements, employer engagement, occupational standards, technical education and career development were examined thematically and used as a comparative benchmark.

Ethical procedures included voluntary participation, information about the study, confidentiality, anonymity and the right to decline participation. The study did not collect identifiable information beyond what was necessary for the research. Documentary sources used for the UK comparison were acknowledged appropriately.

Results

Research Question 1: To what extent are the five reported skills-based education practices implemented in the three state-owned universities in Ondo State?

Table 1 summarises the distribution of respondents across high, moderate and low levels. Moderate exposure predominated for work-based learning and vocational and technical skills training, while low exposure was prominent for entrepreneurship education, practical/project-based learning, and career guidance and employability training.

Table 1. Reported levels of selected skills-based education practices

Practice	High n (%)	Moderate n (%)	Low n (%)	Total
Work-based learning	95 (20.7)	320 (69.7)	45 (9.8)	460
Vocational and technical skills training	110 (23.9)	297 (64.6)	53 (11.5)	460
Entrepreneurship education	143 (31.1)	137 (29.7)	180 (39.1)	460
Practical/project-based learning	152 (33.0)	139 (30.2)	169 (36.7)	460
Career guidance and employability training	128 (27.8)	153 (33.3)	179 (38.9)	460

Source: Fieldwork, 2026.

Research Question 2: What is the extent of university–industry collaboration in the three state-owned universities in Ondo State?

The six collaboration items produced an overall mean of 2.30, below the criterion mean of 2.50, indicating a low reported extent of university–industry collaboration. The item means ranged from 2.1 to 2.4, with curriculum participation by industry experts recording the lowest mean.

Table 2. University–industry collaboration items

No.	Item	SA n (%)	A n (%)	D n (%)	SD n (%)	M
1	Meaningful relationships with employers and industries	56 (12.2)	105 (22.8)	190 (41.3)	109 (23.7)	2.2
2	Industry professionals contribute to students' learning	86 (18.7)	64 (13.9)	230 (50.0)	80 (17.4)	2.3
3	Employers are consulted about graduate skills	68 (14.8)	95 (20.6)	200 (43.5)	97 (21.1)	2.3
4	Industry experts participate in curriculum review	102 (22.2)	12 (2.6)	160 (34.8)	186 (40.4)	2.1
5	Universities and industries collaborate on practical projects	111 (24.1)	46 (10.0)	180 (39.1)	123 (26.7)	2.3
6	Collaboration improves employment chances	92 (20.0)	100 (21.7)	176 (38.3)	92 (20.0)	2.4
Overall mean						2.3

Source: Fieldwork, 2026.

Test of Hypotheses

H₀1: There is no significant relationship between skills-based education practices and perceived employability competence among final-year students in the three state-owned universities.

Table 3 shows a strong positive relationship between the two composite measures ($r = .695$, $p < .001$). H₀1 was therefore rejected at the .05 level. The result indicates association, not causation.

Table 3. Pearson correlation between skills-based education practices and perceived employability competence

Variables	N	df	r	p
Skills-based education practices / perceived employability competence	460	458	.695	< .001

Source: Computed from field data, 2026.

H₀2: The six dimensions do not significantly predict perceived employability competence.

Table 4. Multiple regression predicting perceived employability competence from six skills-based education dimensions

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	1.271	.480	—	2.651	.008
Work-based learning	.080	.013	.272	6.124	< .001
University–industry collaboration	.143	.025	.230	5.780	< .001
Vocational and technical skills training	.123	.026	.145	4.768	< .001
Entrepreneurship education	.102	.050	.122	2.042	.042
Practical/project-based learning	.031	.010	.136	3.138	.002
Career guidance and employability training	.029	.022	.101	1.317	.189

Model: $R = .786$; $R^2 = .619$; adjusted $R^2 = .614$; $F(6, 453) = 122.87$, $p < .001$. Source: Computed from field data, 2026.

The overall regression model was statistically significant and explained 61.9% of the variance in perceived employability competence. Five predictors made significant positive unique contributions: work-based learning, university–industry collaboration, vocational and technical skills training, entrepreneurship education, and practical/project-based learning. Career guidance and employability

training had a positive but non-significant unique contribution ($\beta = .101$, $p = .189$). Thus, H_02 was rejected for the first five predictors but not rejected for career guidance and employability training.

Discussion of Findings

The descriptive results show that skills-based education practices were not consistently reported at a high level. Moderate exposure predominated for work-based learning and vocational and technical skills training, while low exposure was prominent for entrepreneurship, practical/project-based learning and career guidance. This pattern suggests an incomplete connection between academic study and the development of practical, entrepreneurial and career-related competencies. It is consistent with concerns about employability preparation and experiential learning in Nigerian higher education (Okolie et al., 2021; Pitan & Muller, 2023).

The low overall mean for university–industry collaboration indicates limited student-perceived engagement between universities and employers. In particular, the low mean for industry participation in curriculum review suggests that employer input may not be sufficiently visible to students. This supports calls for stronger stakeholder engagement and university–industry partnerships in Nigeria (Nwajiuba et al., 2020; Otache, 2022).

The positive correlation between skills-based education practices and perceived employability competence is consistent with evidence linking work placement and work-integrated learning to employability development (Chukwuedo & Ementa, 2022; Jackson & Dean, 2023). However, the cross-sectional self-report design means that the finding should be interpreted as an association rather than evidence that skills-based practices cause higher employability competence.

The regression results provide a more differentiated picture. Work-based learning had the largest standardised coefficient ($\beta = .272$), followed by university–industry collaboration ($\beta = .230$). These findings support the importance of authentic workplace exposure and employer engagement. Vocational and technical skills training ($\beta = .145$), practical/project-based learning ($\beta = .136$) and entrepreneurship education ($\beta = .122$) also made significant positive contributions. Career guidance had a positive coefficient but was not statistically significant after the other dimensions were controlled. This does not imply that career guidance is unimportant; rather, its unique contribution was not statistically distinguishable from zero in this model and sample.

Lessons from the United Kingdom

The UK evidence provides four practical lessons. First, structured workplace learning can make work experience an explicit part of education. Apprenticeships combine paid employment with formal learning and assessment, while T Levels include substantial industry placement opportunities (Department for Education, 2024). Second, employer involvement in occupational standards and programme design can help education providers respond to changing skills requirements.

Third, clearer progression information can help learners understand links among qualifications, occupations, further learning and employment. Fourth, practical competence and employer engagement can be supported through structured placements, employer advisory arrangements, applied projects and competency-oriented assessment. These principles should be adapted to Nigeria's institutional capacity, funding arrangements and labour-market conditions rather than copied unchanged (British Council, 2025; Department for Education, 2021, 2024; Skills England, 2026; UK Government, 2025).

Table 5. Comparative perspective on skills-based education and employability

Area	Nigeria	United Kingdom	Potential lesson for Nigeria
Curriculum	Practical elements vary across programmes.	Occupational requirements are increasingly linked to technical routes.	Strengthen employer-informed curriculum review.
Employer participation	Engagement exists but is uneven.	Employers have structured roles in standards and placements.	Formalise employer advisory and review roles.
Workplace learning	Industrial training/placements vary in quality and duration.	Apprenticeships and placements provide structured workplace learning.	Make placements supervised, assessed and linked to outcomes.
Technical pathways	TVET and the NSQF provide foundations.	Apprenticeships, T Levels and higher technical routes provide differentiated pathways.	Build clearer links among university, TVET and employment.
Assessment	Written examinations remain prominent.	Technical routes combine knowledge and practical assessment.	Expand authentic and competency-based assessment.
Career development	Career services vary in capacity and timing.	Progression information is more systematically linked to occupations and qualifications.	Integrate career development throughout university education.

Note. TVET = technical and vocational education and training; NSQF = National Skills Qualifications Framework; T Levels = technical qualifications with substantial industry placement. Source: Synthesised from British Council (2025), Department for Education (2021, 2024), Skills England (2026), and UK Government (2025).

Conclusion

Among final-year undergraduates in the three state-owned universities in Ondo State, skills-based education practices were positively and strongly associated with perceived employability competence. The descriptive findings also indicate low reported levels of several practical, entrepreneurial and career-related practices and low university–industry collaboration. The regression model explained 61.9% of the variance in perceived employability competence, with significant positive contributions from work-based learning, university–industry collaboration, vocational and technical skills training, practical/project-based learning and entrepreneurship education. Career guidance and employability training had a positive but non-significant unique contribution. These findings represent associations within the study sample and should not be interpreted as proof of causation. The UK comparison suggests that structured workplace learning, employer engagement, occupational standards, practical assessment and clearer progression pathways offer useful principles for Nigerian higher education when appropriately adapted to local conditions.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to final-year undergraduates in three state-owned universities in Ondo State and should not be generalised automatically to federal or private universities or to all Nigerian universities. Perceived employability competence was self-reported and was not validated against employer assessments, employment outcomes or graduate tracer data. Predictor and outcome measures were collected from the same respondents at one time, creating possible common-method bias. The cross-sectional correlational design does not establish causality, and the UK component relied on documentary evidence rather than primary UK data.

Recommendations

- University management should strengthen structured work-based learning, industrial training, practical and project-based learning, with clear learning outcomes, supervision and assessment.
- Universities and industry partners should strengthen employer advisory arrangements, curriculum review, mentoring, applied projects and other forms of university–industry collaboration.

- Universities should strengthen entrepreneurship and technical skills development and integrate employability and career development throughout students' programmes.
- The National Universities Commission and relevant skills agencies should promote clearer connections among university programmes, technical and vocational education and training, apprenticeships, professional qualifications and employment pathways. UK practices should be adapted rather than copied.

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