

Effect of Entrepreneurship Education on Business Start-Up among University Graduates: Evidence from St. Augustine University of Tanzania

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Abstract

The effect of entrepreneurship education on business start-up among the graduates of St. Augustine University of Tanzania, Mwanza Campus was the focus of this study. In particular, the study examined the impact of the practical business skills, exposure to experiential learning and institutional support mechanisms on graduates' business start-up. The study used the Entrepreneurial Event Theory and a positivist research philosophy and quantitative cross sectional research design. The target population were SAUT graduates of 2024 and 2025 who were living in Mwanza City. The sample size obtained from Cochran's formula for an unknown population was 384 respondents, which was obtained by multistage sampling. Structured questionnaires were used to collect data, and 350 questionnaires were returned and were usable, which was 91.1 per cent of the questionnaires. The overall Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the questionnaire was 0.823, which is considered satisfactory. The data were analyzed by descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis and multiple linear regression in IBM SPSS Statistics Version 26. The findings revealed that practical business skills was rated high with a mean score of 3.60 and was found to have a positive and statistically significant influence on business start-up ($\beta = 0.321$, $p < 0.001$). The mean score of experiential learning exposure was 2.74, which was moderate and had a positive effect on business start-up ($\beta = 0.287$, $p \leq 0.001$). The institutional support mechanisms were rated low (2.47), and was the strongest predictor of business start-up ($\beta = 0.366$, $p < 0.001$). The three predictors together accounted for 62.7 percent of the variance in graduates' business start-up and the regression model was statistically significant. The study found that entrepreneurship education plays a significant role in business creation, however, the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education is lim-

ited by the lack of experiential opportunities and institutional support. The study suggests the creation of a separate entrepreneurship and incubation centre, development of mentorship and financing linkages and the incorporation of supervised venture projects, internships, business simulations and industry linkages in entrepreneurship education.

Keywords

Entrepreneurship Education, Practical Business Skills, Experiential Learning, Institutional Support Mechanisms, Business Start-Up

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship education was now an important policy tool to tackle graduate unemployment and enterprise start-up in both developed and developing economies. The universities in the world have been incorporating business skills, experiential learning exposure, and institutional support mechanisms into entrepreneurship programmes to promote business start-up among graduates (Nabi et al., 2023; Fayolle & Gailly, 2015). Entrepreneurship education in countries like the USA, Canada and some European economies was closely associated with the presence of entrepreneurship incubation centres, mentorship systems, venture financing and industry partnerships, which had a positive impact on the success rate of graduates in starting businesses and their sustainability (Morris et al., 2022). Recent studies have shown that entrepreneurship education is more effective when students are provided with hands-on experiences, such as internships, business simulations, and real-life venture development, in addition to classroom learning (Rahman et al., 2024).

In spite of these global developments, there was still a lack of entrepreneurship education to business start-up in many developing countries. While universities had been increasing their entrepreneurship curriculum, empirical research revealed that entrepreneurship education has been found to enhance entrepreneurial intention more than actual venture creation (Ndofirepi, 2022; Olutuase et al., 2023). Structural barriers such as poor practical training, lack of institutional support, poor mentorship systems, and lack of start-up capital remained a challenge for graduates in transforming entrepreneurial knowledge into operational businesses (Agyapong et al., 2024). As a result, even after being exposed to entrepreneurship education programmes, many graduates continued to be unemployed.

Entrepreneurship education was a strategic intervention for self-employment promotion and economic transformation as youth unemployment was a major socioeconomic challenge. The International Labour Organization reported that youth unemployment in Sub-Saharan Africa remained high, especially among university graduates who are entering into highly competitive labour markets with a lack of formal employment opportunities. As a response, universities in African countries started entrepreneurship education programmes to enhance practical

business skills, innovation capacity and enterprise development. Research in Ghana, South Africa and Kenya, however, found that many entrepreneurship programmes were still largely theoretical and lacked adequate support from incubation services, experiential learning opportunities and entrepreneurial ecosystems, needed for sustainable business creation (Agyapong et al., 2024; Rakhimova et al., 2025). This resulted in a gap between entrepreneurial intentions and actual venture creation that persisted.

Entrepreneurship education in Tanzania had become more institutionalised in higher learning institutions, as part of the national strategy to alleviate the problem of graduate unemployment and encourage youth self-employment. Despite the growth of higher education opportunities, the Tanzania Integrated Labour Force Survey (TILFS) and the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) reports showed that youth unemployment was relatively high among the urban graduates. To overcome this challenge, universities started to include entrepreneurship courses in academic programmes to provide students with hands-on business skills and entrepreneurial competencies. But empirical evidence indicated that entrepreneurship education was still largely theoretical in Tanzania, with little exposure to experiential learning, poor mentorship systems, and poor institutional support mechanisms (Fulgence, 2015; Ndyali, 2016). Additionally, Mbunda & Kapinga (2021) discovered that entrepreneurship education raised students' entrepreneurial awareness and intention, but few students who graduated started businesses.

The challenge was also felt within Mwanza city, one of the fastest growing commercial centres in Tanzania with growing opportunities in trade, fisheries, transport, tourism and small-scale manufacturing. However, business start-up by graduates was not very high, even with these economic opportunities. The graduates encountered various challenges including lack of funding, poor incubation facilities, poor industry-university interface and lack of exposure to entrepreneurial environment in practice. Entrepreneurship education was provided at St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT), Mwanza Campus, to train entrepreneurial skills among students, but there was little empirical evidence that indicated whether the practical business skills, experiential learning exposure and institutional support mechanisms had a significant impact on the actual business start-up among the graduates. Previous studies in Tanzania had focused on entrepreneurial intention instead of measurable outcomes of venture establishment.

2. Research Objectives

The study objectives were generated to give direction in the study of the role of entrepreneurship education in the business start-up of the graduates at St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT), Mwanza Campus. The goals are to evaluate specific aspects of entrepreneurship education such as hands-on business skills, exposure to experiential learning, and institutional support mechanisms and their impact on graduates' entrepreneurial success.

2.1. General Research Objective

The general objective of this study is to examine the effect of entrepreneurship education on business start-up among graduates of St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT), Mwanza Campus.

2.2. Specific Research Objectives

The study is guided by the following specific objectives:

- 1) To examine the effect of practical business skills acquired through entrepreneurship education on business start-up among SAUT Mwanza graduates.
- 2) To assess the effect of experiential learning exposure provided through entrepreneurship education on business start-up among SAUT Mwanza graduates.
- 3) To determine the effect of institutional support mechanisms on business start-up among SAUT Mwanza graduates.

3. Theoretical Review

The Entrepreneurial Event Theory (EET) of **Shapero and Sokol (1982)** was used to guide this study to understand the effect of entrepreneurship education on graduate business start-up. The theory was created to account for the transition from entrepreneurial intention to entrepreneurial behaviour. EET says there are three key factors when it comes to business creation: perceived desirability, perceived feasibility, and propensity to act. Perceived desirability is the extent of which an individual thinks entrepreneurship is an attractive and valuable career choice. Perceived feasibility is an individual's confidence that he or she possesses the knowledge, skills, resources and capability to create and operate a business. Propensity to act is the willingness and readiness of an individual to act when an entrepreneurial opportunity is identified.

The theory was deemed suitable for this study as the study involved actual business start-up among SAUT Mwanza graduates and not just entrepreneurial intentions. EET offers a clear explanation of how the components of entrepreneurship education can turn the entrepreneurial potential of graduates into real business activities. Practical business skills are important to perceived feasibility as they enhance graduates' business planning, financial management, marketing, opportunity identification and enterprise management skills. Experiential learning exposure enhances perceived feasibility and propensity to act by providing graduates practical experience in business projects, internships, simulations and entrepreneurial activities. Perceived desirability and feasibility are strengthened by institutional support mechanisms, such as mentorship, incubation, networking and business development information. Hence, the theory offers a solid basis for explaining the effect of practical business skills, experiential learning exposure and institutional support on the start-up of businesses among the graduates of SAUT Mwanza.

4. Empirical Review

Practical business skills are viewed as being important factors in the business start-

up of graduates in the field of entrepreneurship education as they equip people with the capacity to spot business opportunities, formulate business concepts, manage resources and run businesses effectively. [Rakhimova et al. \(2025\)](#) studied the impact of entrepreneurship education on entrepreneurial skills and business start-ups among students at universities in Uzbekistan, employing a mixed-methods design with 162 students. The study revealed that the training in practical and experiential entrepreneurship has a significant impact on the entrepreneurial competencies, opportunity recognition and entrepreneurial readiness of the students. It also revealed that the partnership between universities and industries, and mentorship, boosted students' confidence and entrepreneurial readiness. The study primarily focused on entrepreneurial competence and employability outcomes, however, rather than on actual business establishment. Furthermore, the study was carried out in Uzbekistan, where the economic and institutional environment is different from Tanzania. Thus, the current study builds on the previous studies by investigating the effect of practical business skills learnt from entrepreneurship education on actual business start-up among SAUT Mwanza graduates.

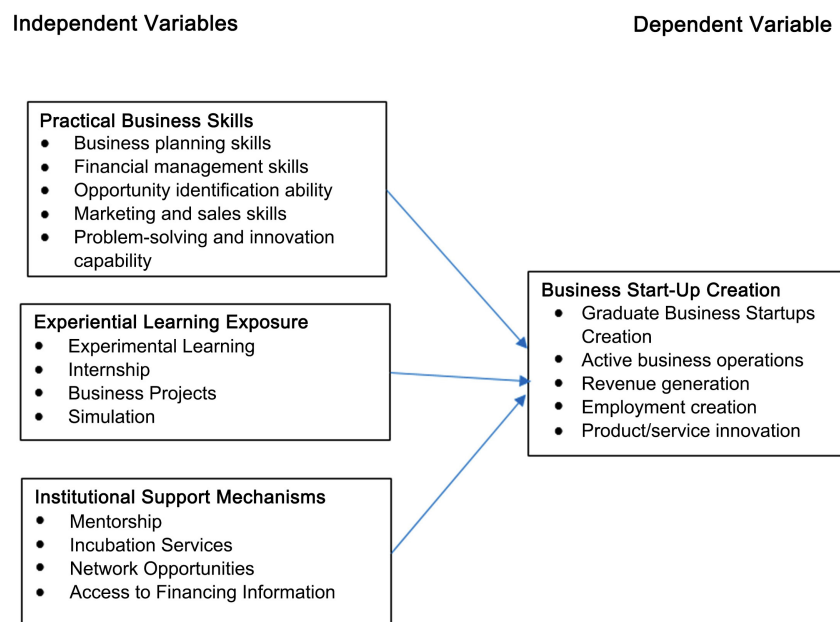
Likewise, [de Campos et al. \(2025\)](#) studied the role of entrepreneurship education strategies focused on start-up in the development of entrepreneurial skills and the creation of new ventures among university students in Brazil. The study used longitudinal case studies in higher education institutions and explored various methods like Project-Based Learning (PBL), Challenge-Based Learning (CBL), and start-up development activities. The results showed that the technical skills, creativity, teamwork, problem-solving skills, and entrepreneurial adaptability of students were enhanced by the practical entrepreneurship training. The practical skills in supporting business creation were illustrated by some students who were able to turn business ideas and Minimum Viable Products (MVPs) into operating businesses. The study, however, was based on a case-study approach and involved limited participants and failed to statistically analyze the relationship between practical skills and business start-up in a larger number of graduates. Therefore, the present study tackles this limitation by quantitatively determining the effect of practical business skills on business start-up among the graduates in the university environment in Tanzania.

[Elliott et al. \(2026\)](#) explored the impact of experiential and challenge-based learning strategies on the transformation of entrepreneurship education for business students at Dublin City University, Ireland. The study was based on the Learning Innovation for Enterprise (LIFE) programme and applied a qualitative reflective approach to assess students' entrepreneurial development. The results showed that the students' entrepreneurial thinking, adaptability, innovation capacity and problem-solving ability were improved after being exposed to real business challenges. The study highlighted that the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education is more effective when students are given the opportunity to experience business environments other than in the classroom, where they are only exposed

to theories. The study, however, did not directly investigate whether students started businesses following entrepreneurship training, but rather offered conceptual and educational information. Moreover, the results were obtained in a developed country context, which is different from the context in which Tanzanian graduates work as entrepreneurs. Hence, the present study aims to give empirical evidence of the influence of practical business skills on actual graduate business start up at SAUT Mwanza campus.

The study by [Indriyarti et al. \(2025\)](#) was a quantitative study that aimed to explore the relationship between entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurial behaviour, and business start-up activities among university students. The study used survey data and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to analyze the relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial capability and business creation behaviour. The results showed that the practical entrepreneurial competence had a significant effect on the students' confidence, behavioural control and commitment to starting up businesses. The study, however, focused primarily on entrepreneurial intention and early entrepreneurial behaviour and not on actual operating businesses. Furthermore, the study was carried out in an Asian urban context that could be different from that of Tanzanian graduates. Hence, the present study adds to the literature by investigating if there is a direct relationship between practical business skills and real business start-up among SAUT Mwanza graduates.

5. Conceptual Framework



The conceptual framework brings together the theoretical perspectives to explain the relationship between entrepreneurship education and business start-up among the graduates of SAUT Mwanza. The framework suggests that the abil-

ity of the graduates to start businesses is strongly affected by the practical business skills, exposure to experiential learning, and institutional support mechanisms. Practical business skills enhance the entrepreneurial competencies of the graduates, experiential learning offers opportunities to apply entrepreneurial knowledge in real-life situations, and institutional support offers an enabling environment by providing mentorship, incubation, networking and business guidance. These are expected to enhance graduates' capacity, confidence and preparedness to convert entrepreneurial knowledge into business ventures. Thus, the framework will be used to study the role of various aspects of entrepreneurship education in the process of business start-up among graduates.

6. Methodology

6.1. Research Philosophy

The research philosophy used in this study was positivist because the study was based on the objective measurement and statistical analysis of the effect of entrepreneurship education on business start-up among SAUT Mwanza graduates. The philosophy was suitable as the study variables such as practical business skills, exposure to experiential learning, institutional support mechanisms and business start-up were measured by quantitative indicators. The data obtained were analyzed statistically and presented numerically to ensure objectivity and reliability of the results obtained.

6.2. Research Design

A quantitative cross sectional research design was used to examine the relationship between the components of entrepreneurship education and graduate business start-up. The design enabled the researcher to collect data at a single point in time and statistically determine the influence of practical business skills, experiential learning exposure, and institutional support mechanisms on business creation. The method was in favor of the use of correlation and regression analysis to investigate the strength and significance of the relationships between the study variables without manipulation.

6.3. Target Population, Sample Size Determination and Sampling Procedure

The target population were the graduates of St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT), Mwanza Campus, who had finished their studies from 2024 to 2025 and were living in Mwanza City. The sampling frame was created using available graduate records, alumni databases, departmental lists and verified alumni communication platforms. The actual number of graduates who could be included was not formally established so the population was assumed to be unknown and Cochran's (1977) formula was used to calculate the minimum sample size of 384 respondents.

A multi-stage sampling process was used to achieve a representative sample of respondents. The graduates were initially grouped by graduation year and aca-

demic programme to reflect the variation in exposure to entrepreneurship education. Where possible, proportional allocation was used and then simple random sampling was used to select graduates from each category to ensure that there was an equal chance of participation among the eligible respondents. Purposive sampling was used to select academic staff who are involved in the delivery of entrepreneurship education to give additional information about entrepreneurship training and institutional support mechanisms.

The respondents were selected by using the alumni list, departmental network and official alumni communication channels. The participation was voluntary and the selected graduates were approached via online and offline communication. The sample size calculated was 384 respondents, but 350 respondents were obtained, with a response rate of 91.1%. The achieved sample was deemed sufficient as it was above the recommended level for quantitative studies and had enough observations for correlation and multiple regression analysis. The 34 questionnaires that were not returned were considered non-response cases and did not significantly impact the reliability of the results.

6.4. Source of Data and Data Collection Methods

Primary and secondary data sources were used in the study. Structured questionnaires were used to gather primary data from the graduates and selected academic staff and secondary data were gathered from academic publications, institutional documents, policies, and relevant reports. The questionnaire was designed based on the research objectives and conceptual framework, which included the following: Practical business skills, exposure to experiential learning, institutional support mechanisms, and business start-up. The instrument was reviewed and pilot tested prior to data collection to ensure its validity and reliability, and Cronbach's Alpha was used to test the internal consistency.

7. Results and Discussion

7.1. Results

7.1.1. Response Rate

A total of 384 questionnaires were sent and 350 were returned, yielding a 91.1% response rate. [Mugenda et al., \(2019\)](#) state that a response rate of more than 70% is sufficient for statistical analysis. Hence, the results obtained were adequate for correlation and regression analysis. 34 questionnaires (8.9%) were not returned.

7.1.2. Descriptive Statistics

This section presents the findings of the study objectives which aimed at finding out the effect of entrepreneurship education on business start-up among SAUT Mwanza graduates. Practical business skills, experiential learning exposure, institutional support mechanisms and business start-up were assessed with descriptive statistics with a five-point Likert scale. Mean values were interpreted as follows: 1.00 - 1.80 very low, 1.81 - 2.60 low, 2.61 - 3.40 moderate, 3.41 - 4.20 high, and 4.21 - 5.00 very high.

1) Practical Business Skills and Business Start-Up

The results showed that the entrepreneurship education moderately agreed that graduates developed practical business skills with a mean score of 3.60. Marketing and sales skills had the lowest mean (Mean = 3.41) and the highest-rated skill was identifying viable business opportunities (Mean = 3.74). This implies that entrepreneurship education enhanced the entrepreneurial capabilities of the graduates but some skills needed to be strengthened through practical means (Table 1).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for practical business skills.

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. deviation
I acquired adequate business planning skills during my studies.	350	1	5	3.68	0.92
I developed financial management skills (budgeting, costing, pricing).	350	1	5	3.55	0.95
I can identify viable business opportunities in the market.	350	1	5	3.74	0.89
I acquired marketing and sales skills through entrepreneurship education.	350	1	5	3.41	1.02
I developed problem-solving and innovation skills.	350	1	5	3.62	0.94
Total	350	1	5	3.60	0.94

Source: Field Data, (2026).

2) Experiential Learning Exposure and Business Start-Up

From the results, it is clear that the graduates had low exposure to the experience of learning, with an average score of 2.74. Business simulations received the highest average score of 2.98, whereas exposure to incubation and entrepreneurship received the lowest average score of 2.51. From the results, it is clear that practical experiences of entrepreneurship were minimal (Table 2).

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for experiential learning exposure.

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. deviation
I participated in business simulations or case studies.	350	1	5	2.98	1.08
I undertook internship or field attachment with entrepreneurs.	350	1	5	2.85	1.12
I participated in business plan competitions.	350	1	5	2.63	1.15
I was involved in real business projects during my studies.	350	1	5	2.74	1.10
I had exposure to incubation or enterprise support activities.	350	1	5	2.51	1.18
Total	350	1	5	2.74	1.13

3) Institutional Support Mechanisms and Business Start-Up

The findings revealed that the institutional support system was weak, with a

mean of 2.47. Networking with industrial partners emerged with the highest mean of 2.58, while the availability of incubation facilities had the lowest mean of 2.31. The findings imply that the graduates were not adequately mentored, financed, incubated, and advised on matters of business (**Table 3**).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics for Institutional support mechanisms.

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. deviation
The university provided access to mentorship programmes.	350	1	5	2.54	1.12
There were incubation facilities available to support student businesses.	350	1	5	2.31	1.18
I received guidance on start-up financing opportunities.	350	1	5	2.45	1.18
The university facilitated networking with industry partners.	350	1	5	2.58	1.10
Business advisory and coaching services were accessible.	350	1	5	2.49	1.13
Total	350	1	5	2.47	1.14

4) Business Start-Up

The results show that business formation among the SAUT graduates was not very high, with a mean score of 2.48. Business formation after graduation was the highest (2.68) among the activities done, whereas employing others scored the least (2.27). It shows that even though some graduates established businesses, most of them were small-scale and not expandable (**Table 4**).

Table 4. Descriptive statistics for business start-up.

Statement	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. deviation
I started a business after graduation.	350	1	5	2.68	1.14
My business is formally registered.	350	1	5	2.41	1.18
My business is currently operating.	350	1	5	2.56	1.12
My business generates income.	350	1	5	2.49	1.15
My business employs other people.	350	1	5	2.27	1.20
Total	350	1	5	2.48	1.16

7.1.3. Inferential Statistics

1) Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

The results of the regression analysis indicated that practical business skills, exposure to experiential learning, and support mechanisms from institutions were significant predictors of business start-up amongst the graduates of SAUT. These three variables explained 62.7% of the variance in business start-up ($R^2 = 0.627$). Support mechanisms from institutions exerted the greatest impact ($\beta = 0.366$), followed by practical business skills ($\beta = 0.321$) and experiential learning exposure ($\beta = 0.287$) (**Tables 5-7**).

Table 5. Model summary^b.

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Std. error of the estimate	Change statistics				
					R square change	F change	df1	df2	Sig. F change
1	0.751 ^a	0.627	0.616	0.500	0.627	53.567	3	346	0.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Practical Business Skills, Experiential Learning Exposure, and Institutional Support Mechanisms; b. Dependent Variable: Business Start-Up.

Table 6. ANOVA^a.

Model	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
1 regression	40.204	3	13.401	53.567	0.000 ^b
Residual	27.271	346	0.250		
Total	67.475	349			

a. Dependent Variable: Business Start-Up; b. Predictors: (Constant), Practical Business Skills, Experiential Learning Exposure, and Institutional Support Mechanisms.

Table 7. Coefficients^a.

Model		Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	0.412	0.210	-	1.962	0.000
	Practical business skills	0.314	0.078	0.321	4.026	0.000
	Experiential learning exposure	0.276	0.085	0.287	3.247	0.000
	Institutional support mechanisms	0.352	0.081	0.366	4.346	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: Business Start-Up.

7.2. Discussion of Findings

7.2.1. Practical Business Skills

Business-related skills received a relatively high rating ($M = 3.60$) and were positively associated with starting up a business ($r = 0.612$; $\beta = 0.321$; $p < 0.001$). Opportunity spotting and planning of the business were relatively good skills; however, sales and marketing were less reliable. This shows that business practical competence facilitates venture formation, but business-oriented skills still need improvement.

7.2.2. Experiential Learning Exposure

The level of experiential learning exposure was moderately high ($M = 2.74$) and the correlation between it and entrepreneurship was the highest ($r = 0.667$; $\beta = 0.287$; $p = 0.001$). While simulations and attachments were better offered than incubation, overall practical exposure was uneven. Entrepreneurs who have been exposed to more practical world tend to convert their entrepreneurship knowledge

into business.

7.2.3. Institutional Support Mechanisms

There was minimal institutional support ($M = 2.47$), which was the variable with the highest standardized effect size regression coefficient ($r = 0.643$; $\beta = 0.366$; $p < 0.001$). Incubation, financial advice, coaching, and mentoring were the major shortcomings. This indicates that having an enabling university environment is crucial in order to turn graduate competencies into viable businesses.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

It is concluded from this study that entrepreneurship education plays an important role in generating business graduates if all these factors are combined together. There is a need for the universities to improve their incubation centers, arrange mentorship programs, industry connections and business finance information.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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