

SHORT-FORM EDUCATIONAL ARCHITECTURE IN BUSINESS SCHOOLS: STRATEGIC POSITIONING OF MICRO-CREDENTIALS AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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Abstract: Business education is undergoing structural transformation driven by labor market volatility, technological acceleration, and shifting learner expectations. Within this context, short-form educational programs—including micro-credentials, intensive modules, executive sprints, and microlearning formats—have emerged as strategic instruments for institutional agility and employability alignment. While existing literature highlights the benefits of micro-credentials in enhancing employability and lifelong learning, limited attention has been given to their strategic positioning within university governance structures. This paper develops a conceptual framework that distinguishes between peripheral, integrated, and hybrid positioning models for short-form educational architecture in business schools. By synthesizing recent scholarship and institutional implementation practices, the study argues that micro-credentials function most effectively when embedded within coherent governance and quality assurance systems. The findings contribute to business education discourse by reframing micro-credentials as structural nodes within a broader short-form educational ecosystem rather than standalone credentials.

Key Words: short-forms, micro-credentials, educational architecture, business education

1. INTRODUCTION

Business schools operate in an increasingly dynamic environment characterized by rapid technological change, evolving workforce requirements, and intensified global competition. Traditional degree programs, while foundational, are often structurally slower to adapt to emerging competency demands.

Short-form educational programs have emerged as adaptive mechanisms within this context. These programs include micro-credentials, intensive delivery modules, executive learning sprints, and structured microlearning units. Literature consistently identifies the growing demand for flexible, competency-based educational formats aligned with industry expectations (Dixon & Makin, 2024; Gamage & Dehideniya, 2025; Rof et al., 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated institutional experimentation with alternative delivery models, increasing the visibility and perceived legitimacy of micro-credentials (Ali et al., 2024). However, visibility does not guarantee systemic integration.

The central research question guiding this paper is:

How should business schools strategically position micro-credentials within a coherent short-form educational architecture to enhance employability while preserving academic integrity?

This question shifts the focus from adoption to governance, from proliferation to positioning.

2. METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This study adopts a structured narrative literature synthesis combined with conceptual analysis. The paper integrates recent peer-reviewed research on micro-credentials, employability, hybrid workforce preparation, digital validation systems, and institutional quality frameworks.

Rather than conducting empirical measurement, the study develops a governance-oriented analytical framework informed by literature and observed university-level implementation patterns. The objective is conceptual clarification and strategic positioning rather than statistical generalization.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMING: SHORT FORMS AS INSTITUTIONAL CAPABILITY

Short-form education should not be interpreted as condensed degrees. Instead, it represents modular capability-building architecture embedded within institutional systems.

Micro-credentials are the most formalized expression of short-form education, typically characterized by competency-based certification, stackability, and transparent learning outcomes (Ha et al., 2025; Hughes & Davis, 2024). They support lifelong learning pathways and flexible professional trajectories (Peters et al., 2025).

At the institutional level, short forms reflect adaptive capacity. Universities leverage micro-credentials to experiment with curricular innovation and increase responsiveness to labor market signals (Iatrellis et al., 2024). However, fragmented implementation risks market saturation and reputational dilution (Powell et al., 2024).

Therefore, the critical determinant of success lies not in credential volume, but in governance coherence and quality assurance alignment (Gamage & Dehideniya, 2025).

4. STRATEGIC POSITIONING MODELS

Three institutional positioning logics emerge from the literature and observed practice:

4.1 Peripheral Model

Micro-credentials operate as standalone offerings outside formal degree programs.

Advantages:

- Speed of implementation
- Market responsiveness
- Entrepreneurial flexibility

Risks:

- Limited academic recognition
- Weak integration with qualification frameworks
- Potential marginalization

4.2 Integrated Model

Micro-credentials are embedded within formal degree curricula and credit-bearing structures.

Advantages:

- Stackability and credit portability
- Academic coherence
- Stronger quality assurance integration

Risks:

- Increased administrative complexity
- Slower innovation cycles

4.3 Hybrid Governance Model

This model combines market-facing flexibility with structured academic recognition. Micro-credentials function as credentialized nodes within a broader short-form educational ecosystem.

Advantages:

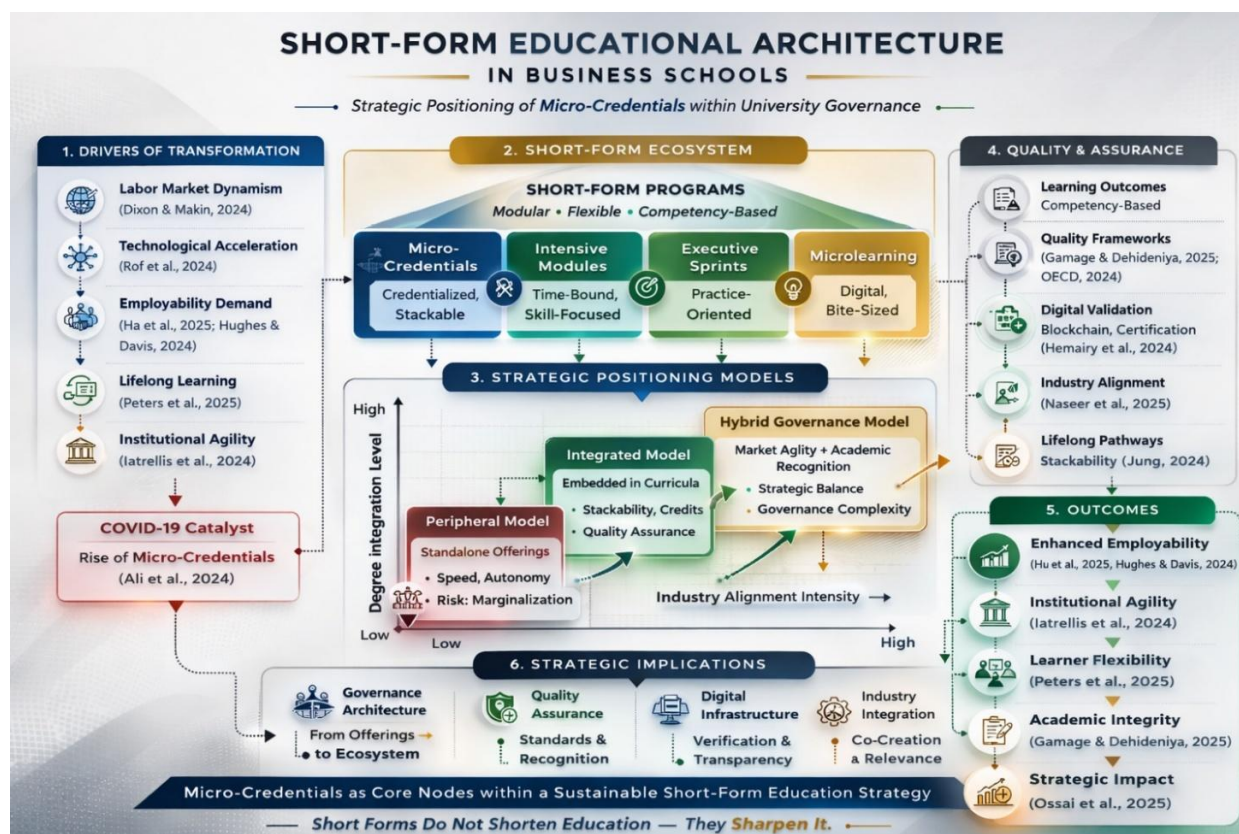
- Balance between agility and legitimacy
- Institutional resilience
- Strategic alignment with industry

Risks:

- Governance coordination challenges
- Increased quality management demands

Quality assurance frameworks are central in all models. Institutions must implement clear standards, transparent recognition mechanisms, and structured review systems (OECD, 2024; Gamage & Dehideniya, 2025).

Emerging digital verification technologies, including blockchain-based certification systems, further strengthen validation and equivalency processes (Hemairy et al., 2024).



Picture 1. Short-forms Educational Architecture in Business Schools

5. IMPLEMENTATION PILLARS IN BUSINESS SCHOOLS

Successful short-form integration in business education rests on four structural pillars:

5.1 Competency Architecture

Clear learning outcomes and measurable competencies aligned with industry collaboration enhance employability (Naseer et al., 2025).

5.2 Hybrid Workforce Readiness

Digital and hybrid skill development is increasingly central to graduate preparation (Hughes & Davis, 2024).

5.3 Capability Maturity

Capability maturity frameworks for micro-credential providers guide institutional readiness and governance structuring (Iatrellis et al., 2024).

5.4 Lifelong Learning Integration

Personalized and open learning models reinforce stackability and non-linear progression pathways (Jung, 2024).

When institutions treat micro-credentials as strategic capability instruments rather than isolated micro-products, coherence and stakeholder trust increase. Therefore, the critical determinant of success lies not in credential volume, but in governance coherence and quality assurance alignment (Gamage & Dehideniya, 2025).

6. DISCUSSION

Business education faces simultaneous pressures of technological transformation, globalization, and evolving employability expectations (Ossai et al., 2025). Short-form architecture allows institutions to respond without full structural redesign of degree programs.

However, proliferation without strategic integration may generate fragmentation and credential inflation. The distinction between offering micro-credentials and architecting a short-form ecosystem is therefore fundamental. The former is operational. The latter is strategic.

7. CONTRIBUTION AND CONCLUSION

This paper contributes to business education scholarship by:

1. Reframing micro-credentials as structural nodes within a broader short-form educational architecture.
 2. Proposing a three-model typology (peripheral, integrated, hybrid) to guide institutional positioning.
 3. Connecting employability discourse with governance architecture and quality assurance systems.
- The originality lies in shifting the debate from micro-credential adoption to institutional design logic.

Short-form credentials represent adaptive evolution within business education. Their effectiveness depends on:

- Governance clarity
- Robust quality assurance
- Transparent recognition pathways
- Industry alignment (Gamage & Dehideniya, 2025)

When strategically positioned, short forms do not shorten education—they sharpen it.

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