



Enhancing Economic Empowerment through Entrepreneurship Skills Acquisition Among Students in Public Universities in Rivers State

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Abstract

This paper investigated entrepreneurship skills acquisition and economic empowerment of students in public universities in Rivers State. As unemployment rates continue to rise in Nigeria, higher education institutions have resorted to equipping students with practical skills necessary for business creation and self-reliance. This paper discussed various entrepreneurship skills imparted through university programmes, including business management, financial literacy, creativity, and problem-solving. Furthermore, it examined the impact of these skills on students' ability to establish and sustain businesses, thereby fostering financial independence and reducing dependence on paid employment. Moreover, the paper identified challenges that hinder effective entrepreneurship skills acquisition, such as inadequate funding, limited access to start-up capital, and insufficient infrastructural support. Additionally, it highlighted the broader socio-economic benefits of entrepreneurship education, including job creation, poverty reduction, and economic diversification. The paper highlighted the need for collaboration among universities, government agencies, and private sector stakeholders in strengthening entrepreneurship education through improved policies, financial assistance, and mentorship programmes. The paper concluded that public universities serve as key institutions in equipping students with essential business management, financial literacy, innovation, and problem-solving skills necessary for establishing and sustaining entrepreneurial ventures. Amongst others, the paper suggested that Ministry of Education should develop and enforce policies that integrate practical entrepreneurship training into university curricula, ensuring that students gain hands-on experience alongside theoretical knowledge.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship Skills, Economic Empowerment, Public Universities, Self-Reliance, Business Sustainability.

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INTRODUCTION

Acquiring entrepreneurial skills has become an integral component of higher education, particularly in public universities where students are expected to gain competencies that will render them economically empowered. The rising unemployment rate in Nigeria has necessitated a shift away from white-collar jobs to entrepreneurship, and therefore entrepreneurship education is an essential tool for equipping students with the capacity to create and run enterprises. Rivers State public institutions are at the forefront of this transformation by including entrepreneurship training in their curricula, with a view to empowering students to respond to the demands of a competitive and dynamic economy. Entrepreneurship skills acquisition encompasses a variety of skills such as business management, financial literacy, creativity, innovation, and problem-solving, which enable students to establish and run entrepreneurial businesses (Okonkwo & Amadi, 2021).

Moreover, economic empowerment through entrepreneurship training enables students to obtain financial autonomy, which reduces reliance on remunerative work and promotes the culture of independence (Eze & Chukwuma, 2022). This empowerment process not only enables the students to achieve the ability to identify business prospects but also to develop strategic plans and efficiently manage resources to achieve sustainable economic development. Rivers State public universities have adopted various strategies, including practical training, mentorship programmes, and business incubation centers, to enhance entrepreneurial skills among students. Although these programmes are designed to promote entrepreneurship, challenges such as inadequate funding, unavailability of business start-up capital, and inadequate infrastructural support hinder the full realization of their objectives. The solution of such issues requires joint efforts among the universities, the government bodies, and the private sector stakeholders to create an enabling environment for entrepreneurial development.

Moreover, the impact of entrepreneurship skill acquisition extends beyond individual economic benefits to broader socio-economic progress. Preparing students to start their own businesses, they assist in the provision of employment opportunities, poverty reduction, and diversification of the economy (Chinwe & Nwosu, 2020). Entrepreneurship also stimulates innovation and competition across various sectors, thus making student's key promoters of national economic development. The role of the public universities in Rivers State in catalyzing this transformation makes it essential that entrepreneurship education programmes are constantly assessed and strengthened to remain relevant to industry demands and economic requirements. Improving entrepreneurship skill development through formal education, access to finance, and policy action can potentially enhance the economic empowerment of students and bridge the education-employment gap. A good system of entrepreneurship education within Rivers State universities can serve as a leading impetus towards sustainable economic growth, equipping students with skills to navigate the complexities of business and achieve lasting financial stability.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Human Capital Theory

Human Capital Theory, developed by Gary Becker and Theodore Schultz in the 1960s, emphasizes the role of education, training, and skill acquisition in enhancing individuals'

productivity and economic contributions. This theory suggests that just as investments in physical capital yield economic returns, investments in human capital such as education and skill development result in higher earnings, improved employment opportunities, and overall economic growth. Becker's (1964) research particularly highlights the impact of formal education and workplace training on individual productivity, while Schultz (1961) argued that human capital development is essential for national economic advancement, as it equips individuals with the necessary skills to drive innovation and efficiency. Stantcheva (2021) builds upon this foundational theory by examining how public policies, particularly taxation, influence investments in human capital and social mobility, emphasizing the importance of supportive governmental frameworks in ensuring equitable access to education and skill development.

Human Capital Theory serves as a relevant framework for understanding how equipping students with entrepreneurial skills enhances their ability to create economic opportunities. Public universities play a vital role in shaping students' entrepreneurial capacities by providing education, training, and mentorship, all of which contribute to human capital development. When students acquire entrepreneurship skills, they improve their ability to establish businesses, create employment opportunities, and contribute to the economic development of their communities. This aligns with Becker's assertion that human capital investment increases individual and collective economic outcomes.

Furthermore, the theory is applicable in examining the extent to which university curricula, government policies, and institutional support structures contribute to students' economic empowerment. Stantcheva's (2021) perspective on human capital investment highlights the need for policies that encourage skill acquisition, such as government incentives for entrepreneurship training, business incubation programmes, and access to startup funding. The Nigerian government, policymakers, and educational institutions must ensure that entrepreneurship education in public universities is practical, skill-oriented, and adequately funded to maximize its impact on students' economic prospects.

Additionally, the theory underscores the importance of bridging the gap between education and the labor market by fostering entrepreneurial competencies that enable students to become self-reliant. This is particularly relevant in Rivers State, where unemployment rates remain a challenge, making it essential for students to develop skills that enable them to generate economic opportunities rather than rely solely on formal employment. Investing in entrepreneurship education and skill acquisition programmes contributes to the development of a workforce that is not only employable but also capable of driving innovation and economic growth.

Human Capital Theory provides a strong foundation for understanding the relationship between entrepreneurship education and economic empowerment. The theory reinforces the need for strategic investments in skill acquisition as a means of equipping students with the competencies required for economic self-sufficiency. Applying this theory to the study highlights the necessity for educational policies, institutional frameworks, and government support to facilitate entrepreneurship development, ensuring that students in public universities in Rivers State can harness their skills for sustainable economic empowerment.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Concept of Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is a dynamic and evolving concept that plays a crucial role in the economic development and innovation capacity of societies across the globe. At its core, entrepreneurship refers to the process of identifying, developing, and bringing a vision to life. This vision may be an innovative idea, a new product or service, or a more efficient way of doing business. The individual who undertakes this process is known as an entrepreneur.

Entrepreneurship is commonly associated with the creation of new businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are critical engines for economic growth, job creation, and poverty alleviation (Hisrich, Peters, & Shepherd, 2017). However, entrepreneurship extends beyond mere business creation to include social, corporate, and innovative dimensions. It involves risk-taking, creativity, and the ability to identify and exploit opportunities in a volatile market environment.

Historically, the concept of entrepreneurship has been interpreted through various economic theories. Classical economists like Richard Cantillon and Jean-Baptiste Say emphasized the entrepreneur's role in bearing risk and coordinating production. Cantillon defined an entrepreneur as a risk-bearer who buys at certain prices and sells at uncertain prices, while Say described the entrepreneur as an agent who combines the factors of production and brings them into productive use. Joseph Schumpeter (1934), a prominent economist, later redefined entrepreneurship as a process of "creative destruction," where innovation disrupts existing market structures and creates new industries. Schumpeter's theory highlights the entrepreneur's role as an innovator who transforms economic systems through new combinations of products, processes, and business models.

In modern literature, entrepreneurship is increasingly viewed through a multidisciplinary lens, integrating economics, sociology, psychology, and management studies. According to Kuratko (2016), entrepreneurship is more than the simple act of starting a business; it is a mindset and process of identifying opportunities, innovating solutions, mobilizing resources, and managing growth. Entrepreneurs are change agents who drive economic and social transformation by leveraging resources creatively and managing uncertainties effectively.

One of the critical components of entrepreneurship is opportunity recognition the ability to spot gaps in the market and create value by meeting unmet needs. Shane and Venkataraman (2000) argued that opportunity recognition is what distinguishes entrepreneurs from non-entrepreneurs, emphasizing the importance of knowledge, prior experience, and cognitive processes in identifying viable ventures.

Another essential aspect is innovation, which can be product-based, process-based, organizational, or marketing-related. Innovation differentiates entrepreneurial ventures from routine business operations. Drucker (1985) stated that innovation is the specific tool of entrepreneurs by which they exploit change as an opportunity for a different business or service. Moreover, entrepreneurship encompasses different forms such as necessity entrepreneurship, where individuals start businesses out of economic need, and opportunity entrepreneurship, where businesses are started to exploit perceived opportunities. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) reports that both forms coexist in many economies, though opportunity-driven entrepreneurship tends to yield higher levels of innovation and growth.

Social entrepreneurship is another growing dimension of the concept. Unlike traditional entrepreneurship, which focuses on profit maximization, social entrepreneurship aims to address social problems and generate social value. Social entrepreneurs combine business acumen with a mission to improve communities and resolve societal challenges (Dees, 2001).

Thus, entrepreneurship is multifaceted and integral to economic and social development. It involves identifying opportunities, innovating, taking risks, and managing ventures to create value. Entrepreneurship is not limited to business start-ups; it includes the transformation of existing businesses, solving social issues, and promoting innovation across all sectors. Understanding the evolving nature of entrepreneurship is vital for policymakers, educators, and investors seeking to foster an environment conducive to entrepreneurial success.

Entrepreneurship Skills Acquisition

Entrepreneurship skills acquisition refers to the process of learning and developing the necessary abilities to identify, create, and manage business opportunities effectively. This process involves gaining knowledge, competencies, and attitudes that enable individuals to establish and sustain successful entrepreneurial ventures. Eneh and Awara (2020) explained that entrepreneurship skills include creativity, risk-taking, financial literacy, problem-solving, and decision-making, all of which contribute to business success. Developing these skills requires a combination of formal education, practical experience, mentorship, and exposure to real-world business challenges.

Entrepreneurship education plays a fundamental role in equipping individuals with the necessary skills to navigate the complexities of business environments. Universities, vocational institutions, and training centers offer structured programmes that teach business planning, financial management, and innovation techniques. Obaji and Okeke (2019) emphasized that entrepreneurship education not only enhances individuals' abilities to start businesses but also improves their adaptability to changing economic conditions. Moreover, practical training, such as internships and business simulations, allows learners to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios, fostering hands-on experience that strengthens their entrepreneurial competence.

Government policies and initiatives also influence entrepreneurship skills acquisition. Programmes that provide financial support, business development training, and mentorship opportunities encourage more individuals to pursue entrepreneurship as a viable career path. Oduolowu and Akintunde (2021) pointed out that access to credit facilities, business grants, and low-interest loans plays a crucial role in enhancing entrepreneurship skills, particularly in developing economies. These financial interventions enable aspiring entrepreneurs to experiment with business ideas and gain practical experience without the burden of excessive financial risk.

Technology has further transformed how entrepreneurship skills are acquired. Online learning platforms, digital business tools, and social media offer entrepreneurs access to a wealth of resources that enhance their skills. Chukwuma and Nwosu (2020) noted that digital technology enables entrepreneurs to explore new markets, improve efficiency, and enhance customer engagement. Consequently, individuals with access to technological resources are better equipped to develop innovative solutions that contribute to business growth and sustainability.

Entrepreneurship skills acquisition remains a vital element in fostering self-reliance and business success. As economic landscapes continue to evolve, individuals must continuously upgrade their entrepreneurial abilities to remain competitive. Structured education, government

support, and technological advancements collectively enhance the ability of aspiring entrepreneurs to develop sustainable businesses, create employment opportunities, and contribute to economic development.

Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment refers to the process through which individuals, groups, or communities gain the ability to make economic decisions that improve their financial well-being and overall quality of life. It involves access to resources, opportunities, and skills that enable people to participate actively in economic activities, generate income, and achieve financial independence. Akinola and Aluko (2021) stated that economic empowerment reduces poverty, enhances social inclusion, and fosters economic stability by equipping individuals with the tools necessary to improve their financial conditions.

Financial literacy and skills development are fundamental aspects of economic empowerment. Individuals must understand how to manage personal and business finances, invest wisely, and make informed economic decisions. Edeh and Nwachukwu (2020) explained that financial education plays a critical role in promoting self-sufficiency and reducing dependency on external financial assistance. When individuals develop financial management skills, they can plan effectively for the future, save, and invest in productive activities that enhance their economic status.

Access to credit and capital is another crucial factor in economic empowerment. Many individuals and small business owners struggle to grow financially due to a lack of funding. Government initiatives, microfinance institutions, and financial inclusion programmes help bridge this gap by providing capital to economically disadvantaged groups. Yusuf and Adegbite (2019) observed that financial empowerment programmes targeting women, youth, and low-income individuals have proven effective in increasing economic participation and reducing inequalities. The availability of credit facilities allows individuals to invest in businesses, acquire assets, and expand their income-generating activities.

Entrepreneurship is a key driver of economic empowerment, particularly in developing economies. Self-employment opportunities enable individuals to create wealth, support their families, and contribute to national economic growth. Okeke and Uchenna (2022) explained that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) significantly contribute to employment generation and economic stability. When individuals are empowered economically, they have the autonomy to make strategic financial decisions that enhance their well-being.

Technology and digital transformation have further advanced economic empowerment. Online businesses, e-commerce platforms, and remote work opportunities have provided new income streams for individuals across various economic backgrounds. Nwankwo and Adebayo (2021) indicated that digital financial services have enabled greater access to banking, savings, and investment platforms, allowing individuals to build financial security. These technological advancements facilitate inclusive economic participation, making financial empowerment accessible to a wider population.

Economic empowerment remains essential in fostering sustainable development and financial independence. Through financial literacy, access to credit, entrepreneurship, and digital transformation, individuals can enhance their economic stability and contribute to overall economic progress. Ensuring that marginalized groups have access to resources and opportunities will further promote inclusive growth and economic resilience.

Entrepreneurship Skills Acquisition and Economic Empowerment

Entrepreneurship skills acquisition and economic empowerment are interconnected concepts that contribute to individual financial stability and national economic development. Acquiring entrepreneurial skills enables individuals to become self-reliant, create businesses, and participate actively in wealth creation. Economic empowerment, on the other hand, ensures that individuals have the necessary resources, opportunities, and capabilities to improve their financial well-being. Obi and Okonkwo (2020) argued that entrepreneurship serves as a tool for economic empowerment by providing individuals with the skills required to identify business opportunities, manage financial risks, and drive economic growth.

Developing entrepreneurship skills fosters job creation, which is a critical aspect of economic empowerment. When individuals acquire skills such as business management, marketing, and financial planning, they are better equipped to establish sustainable enterprises. Adedokun and Ibrahim (2019) emphasized that entrepreneurship-driven employment reduces economic dependency and enhances financial independence. The presence of a skilled entrepreneurial workforce strengthens local economies by increasing business activities, generating income, and reducing poverty levels.

Access to entrepreneurship training and financial support significantly influences economic empowerment outcomes. Government agencies, educational institutions, and private organizations play essential roles in providing business training, mentorship, and funding opportunities. Adebisi and Olayemi (2021) noted that entrepreneurship development programmes that incorporate skill-building, business financing, and market access strategies contribute to long-term economic sustainability. These programmes enable aspiring entrepreneurs to transform their business ideas into viable ventures, thereby fostering economic inclusion and stability.

Technology and digital innovations have further strengthened the relationship between entrepreneurship and economic empowerment. The rise of e-commerce, digital marketing, and online business platforms has created new opportunities for entrepreneurs to reach global markets. Okafor and Eze (2022) stated that technology-driven entrepreneurship allows individuals to leverage digital tools for financial growth, reducing barriers to market entry and enhancing business scalability. Digital financial services, including mobile banking and online payment systems, have also improved access to capital, enabling entrepreneurs to grow their businesses efficiently.

Ensuring that individuals have access to entrepreneurship training, financial support, and technology-driven business opportunities remains crucial in enhancing economic empowerment. The synergy between entrepreneurship skills acquisition and economic empowerment highlights the transformative potential of skill development in creating sustainable economic solutions.

Entrepreneurship Education in Nigerian Public Universities

Entrepreneurship education in Nigerian public universities serves as a means to equip students with skills necessary for self-employment and wealth creation. This education emphasizes creativity, innovation, financial management, and business planning to prepare students for entrepreneurial endeavors. Okezie and Umeh (2022) stated that entrepreneurship education is a fundamental tool for reducing unemployment by fostering self-reliance among graduates.

Universities in Nigeria incorporate entrepreneurship courses into their curricula to expose students to business principles, risk assessment, and strategic decision-making.

The National Universities Commission (NUC) made entrepreneurship education compulsory in all public universities to ensure that graduates are not solely dependent on government employment. Institutions have established entrepreneurship centers that provide training in business start-ups, digital entrepreneurship, and product marketing. Anene and Uchenna (2023) highlighted that these centers enable students to engage in practical entrepreneurial activities, thereby enhancing their business acumen. Additionally, students are encouraged to develop business plans, participate in start-up incubation programmes, and seek funding from available government and private sector initiatives.

Although entrepreneurship education has been widely adopted in Nigerian universities, its implementation is met with various challenges. A major concern is the lack of sufficient funding to provide state-of-the-art training facilities and modern entrepreneurial resources. Igwe and Okonjo (2023) argued that the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education depends on the availability of practical learning environments, mentorship programmes, and collaboration with industry experts. Some universities still struggle with outdated curricula that do not align with evolving business trends, making it difficult for students to acquire relevant entrepreneurial competencies.

Improving entrepreneurship education requires stronger partnerships between universities, the government, and the private sector. If well-structured, it can enhance students' entrepreneurial mindset, thereby contributing to national economic growth. Emphasizing entrepreneurship within higher institutions will enable students to become self-sufficient, create job opportunities, and drive sustainable economic development in Nigeria.

Impact of Entrepreneurship Skills on Students' Economic Independence

Entrepreneurship skills empower students to achieve financial independence by providing them with the knowledge and competencies needed to start and sustain businesses. These skills include financial literacy, business management, and innovation, which are essential for navigating economic challenges. Nwosu and Chidiebere (2023) observed that students who acquire entrepreneurship skills are more likely to engage in business activities that generate income and reduce dependence on traditional employment. Economic independence fosters financial stability, enabling students to meet their financial needs and invest in future business ventures.

Entrepreneurship training in universities exposes students to real-world business opportunities, allowing them to test innovative ideas and gain practical experience. Many institutions provide incubation programmes where students receive mentorship, funding support, and business advisory services. Edeh and Akinyemi (2023) noted that students involved in such programmes develop better problem-solving skills, financial management abilities, and resilience in business operations. These skills enable them to establish and sustain profitable ventures before and after graduation.

Financial literacy is another critical component of entrepreneurship skills that enhances students' economic independence. Those who understand budgeting, investment strategies, and risk management are more capable of making informed financial decisions. Akanbi and Oladipo (2023) emphasized that financial literacy equips students with the ability to manage earnings, plan for the future, and avoid excessive debt. Entrepreneurship education that incorporates

financial literacy ensures that students can sustain their businesses and make profitable financial decisions.

Despite the advantages of entrepreneurship skills in achieving economic independence, challenges such as limited access to start-up capital and inadequate business mentorship persist. Many students struggle to secure funding for their business ideas, limiting their ability to establish and grow enterprises. Adeyemi and Osagie (2023) suggested that government agencies and financial institutions should provide accessible business grants, low-interest loans, and entrepreneurship funding programmes to support students. Enhancing financial accessibility and mentorship programmes will ensure that students successfully transition into financially independent entrepreneurs.

Economic independence among students reduces unemployment rates and promotes business expansion, which contributes to national development. Strengthening entrepreneurship training in universities will enable students to maximize their business potential, develop financial security, and contribute to Nigeria's economic advancement.

Role of Entrepreneurship Skills in Job Creation and Self-Reliance

Entrepreneurship skills are essential for fostering job creation and promoting self-reliance among students and graduates. The Nigerian labor market continues to face challenges in providing adequate employment opportunities, making entrepreneurship a viable alternative. Ibe and Chigozie (2023) stated that individuals with entrepreneurship skills can create employment opportunities by establishing small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which generate income and sustain economic growth. Entrepreneurship training prepares individuals to recognize market opportunities, develop business strategies, and manage financial resources effectively.

Self-reliance is strengthened when students and graduates acquire entrepreneurship skills that enable them to establish their own businesses instead of relying on formal employment. Many Nigerian youths who possess entrepreneurial competencies engage in business ventures such as digital marketing, fashion design, and agribusiness, leading to financial sustainability. Adegbite and Onyekachi (2023) emphasized that entrepreneurship-driven self-reliance reduces dependence on government jobs and fosters economic empowerment through wealth creation.

Job creation through entrepreneurship extends beyond business owners to employees, suppliers, and service providers in various industries. Entrepreneurs contribute to economic expansion by developing innovative products and services that meet consumer needs. Eze and Udoh (2023) highlighted that SMEs account for a substantial percentage of job creation in Nigeria, demonstrating the critical role of entrepreneurship in reducing unemployment. Supporting entrepreneurship development will enhance economic productivity and provide job opportunities for many individuals in the country.

Several challenges hinder entrepreneurship-driven job creation, including inadequate access to business capital, lack of business-friendly policies, and an unstable economic environment. Okoro and Adebisi (2023) suggested that government agencies and financial institutions should establish policies that facilitate entrepreneurship growth by providing access to funding, reducing bureaucratic barriers, and ensuring a stable economic climate. Creating an enabling business environment will encourage more individuals to engage in entrepreneurship, leading to increased job creation and economic stability.

Encouraging entrepreneurship among students and graduates will not only reduce unemployment but also drive sustainable economic development. Strengthening

entrepreneurship education, improving access to financial resources, and fostering a culture of innovation will ensure that individuals leverage entrepreneurship skills to achieve self-reliance and contribute to national growth.

Types of Entrepreneurship Skills Acquired by Students

Entrepreneurship skills equip students with the knowledge and abilities necessary to establish and manage successful business ventures. These skills enable students to develop problem-solving capabilities, financial acumen, and managerial expertise, all of which are crucial for self-employment and economic empowerment. The following are some key types of entrepreneurship skills acquired by students:

Business Management Skills

Business management skills involve the ability to plan, organize, and oversee business activities to ensure operational efficiency and profitability. These skills include decision-making, resource allocation, human resource management, and strategic planning. According to Adebayo and Chukwu (2023), students who acquire business management skills are better equipped to handle business challenges, such as competition, financial constraints, and customer satisfaction. Proper management practices enhance business sustainability and enable entrepreneurs to make informed decisions that align with market demands. Moreover, business management skills foster leadership qualities, allowing students to effectively coordinate business operations and employee performance. Students with strong management abilities can implement efficient business strategies, monitor financial records, and ensure compliance with regulatory policies. These competencies help students build and sustain successful enterprises while contributing to economic development.

Financial Literacy Skills

Financial literacy skills enable students to manage business finances effectively, including budgeting, pricing strategies, and investment decisions. Akinyele and Olatunji (2023) noted that financial literacy is essential for ensuring the financial sustainability of a business, as it helps entrepreneurs minimize risks and optimize profits. Without adequate financial skills, business owners may struggle with improper fund management, leading to business failure. Students who acquire financial literacy skills understand the principles of bookkeeping, cost control, and financial forecasting, all of which are critical for making informed business decisions. Additionally, financial literacy enhances the ability to secure funding from investors, financial institutions, or government grants. Mastering these skills ensures that students can manage business capital efficiently, avoid financial mismanagement, and achieve long-term profitability.

Marketing and Sales Skills

Marketing and sales skills are essential for business growth, customer acquisition, and long-term profitability. Marketing involves identifying customer needs, segmenting target markets, and promoting products or services through strategies such as branding, digital advertising, and content creation (Kotler & Keller, 2016). Key skills include market research, customer

segmentation, and digital marketing proficiency. Sales, on the other hand, focuses on converting prospects into paying customers through persuasion, relationship-building, and effective communication. Essential sales skills include prospecting, product knowledge, negotiation, and closing techniques (Rackham, 1988). The integration of both functions known as ‘smarketing’ ensures alignment between marketing strategies and sales execution, improving overall performance and customer satisfaction (Kotler et al., 2006). In today’s competitive environment, professionals and entrepreneurs must develop strong marketing and sales capabilities to drive engagement, generate revenue, and sustain competitive advantage.

Innovation and Creativity Skills

Innovation and creativity skills enable students to develop unique business ideas and create competitive advantages in their industries. Creativity allows entrepreneurs to design new products, improve existing services, and find solutions to business challenges. According to Adeyemi and Okeke (2023), businesses that thrive in competitive markets rely on innovative ideas and continuous improvement to maintain customer interest. Students who cultivate innovative thinking can identify unmet market needs and introduce groundbreaking solutions that enhance business profitability. Additionally, creativity fosters adaptability, enabling entrepreneurs to navigate economic uncertainties and technological advancements. Businesses that prioritize innovation often experience long-term sustainability and improved market positioning. Therefore, acquiring creative skills is essential for students who seek to establish dynamic and resilient enterprises.

Problem-Solving and Decision-Making Skills

Problem-solving and decision-making skills enable students to analyze business challenges and implement effective solutions. These skills involve critical thinking, logical reasoning, and strategic planning, all of which are necessary for overcoming business obstacles. Umeh and Chidiebere (2023) stated that successful entrepreneurs must be able to evaluate risks, assess alternatives, and make sound business decisions under pressure. Entrepreneurial problem-solving skills help students identify weaknesses in business operations and develop strategies to enhance efficiency. Decision-making skills also play a crucial role in financial planning, marketing strategies, and business expansion. Students who acquire these competencies are more likely to navigate economic uncertainties, respond to customer demands, and sustain business growth in a competitive environment.

Networking and Communication Skills

Networking and communication skills are essential for establishing business relationships, negotiating deals, and attracting investors. Effective communication enables entrepreneurs to convey business ideas clearly, engage with customers, and build strong partnerships with stakeholders. According to Bello and Adebajo (2023), networking skills allow students to connect with industry professionals, mentors, and potential business collaborators, which can enhance their business growth. Moreover, strong communication skills help students build brand credibility and customer trust, leading to increased business opportunities. Entrepreneurs who excel in networking can access mentorship programmes, funding opportunities, and industry

insights that contribute to business success. These skills are particularly crucial in expanding business ventures and securing long-term sustainability.

Adaptability and Resilience Skills

Adaptability and resilience skills enable students to respond to market fluctuations, business challenges, and unforeseen economic conditions. Entrepreneurs often face uncertainties such as financial instability, changing consumer trends, and technological advancements. Nwachukwu and Ojo (2023) emphasized that students who develop resilience are better prepared to handle setbacks, maintain business continuity, and seek alternative solutions to challenges. Adaptability allows entrepreneurs to modify business strategies in response to emerging trends and customer demands. Entrepreneurs who possess resilience can recover from financial losses, rebrand their businesses, and explore new market opportunities. These skills ensure long-term business survival and personal growth, making them vital for students who aspire to become successful entrepreneurs.

CHALLENGES OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP SKILLS ACQUISITION IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

Entrepreneurship skills acquisition in public universities plays a crucial role in equipping students with the knowledge and competencies needed for self-employment and economic empowerment. However, various challenges hinder the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian public universities. These challenges affect students' ability to develop the required skills, thereby limiting their entrepreneurial potential. The following are some of the major challenges associated with entrepreneurship skills acquisition in public universities.

Inadequate Funding

Limited financial resources remain a major barrier to effective entrepreneurship education in public universities. Many institutions lack sufficient funding to provide modern facilities, practical training, and access to business incubation centers. According to Okafor and Uchenna (2022), entrepreneurship education requires financial investment in technology, laboratory equipment, and startup support, yet most public universities in Nigeria struggle with poor funding. The absence of adequate financial support prevents students from gaining hands-on experience in entrepreneurship, leading to gaps in their skill development. Furthermore, inadequate funding affects the quality of teaching staff and the provision of essential materials. Without proper financial backing, universities may find it difficult to organize workshops, seminars, and business mentorship programmes that enhance entrepreneurship skills acquisition. This financial limitation ultimately affects the employability and self-reliance of graduates.

Lack of Practical Exposure

Entrepreneurship education in many public universities is often theoretical, with little emphasis on practical application. The lack of real-world business exposure prevents students from gaining the hands-on experience needed to develop entrepreneurial competencies. Eze and Udoh (2023) noted that many Nigerian universities still rely on outdated teaching methods that focus more on

lectures and textbooks rather than experiential learning. Practical training, such as business simulations, startup incubators, and internships, is crucial in equipping students with relevant entrepreneurship skills. However, most universities lack partnerships with industries and financial institutions that could provide students with opportunities for real-world business engagement. As a result, students graduate with limited entrepreneurial experience, making it difficult for them to establish and sustain businesses.

Shortage of Qualified Entrepreneurship Educators

The effectiveness of entrepreneurship education largely depends on the quality of instructors delivering the training. Many Nigerian public universities face a shortage of lecturers who have practical business experience. According to Anene and Uchenna (2023), most entrepreneurship lecturers possess academic qualifications but lack firsthand experience in business startups, investment, and risk management. This knowledge gap reduces the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education, as students struggle to acquire skills that can only be learned through practical engagement. Moreover, some universities assign entrepreneurship courses to lecturers from unrelated disciplines, leading to ineffective knowledge transfer. Without exposure to business operations, educators may find it challenging to teach students real-world business strategies and skills, thereby limiting their entrepreneurial development.

Limited Access to Start-Up Capital

Access to startup capital is one of the biggest challenges faced by students aspiring to become entrepreneurs. Public universities often do not provide financial support or credit facilities to students who wish to start businesses. According to Anene and Uchenna (2023), lack of access to funding discourages students from applying their entrepreneurship skills, as they are unable to turn their business ideas into reality. Although some financial institutions and government agencies offer loans and grants to young entrepreneurs, many students lack awareness of these funding opportunities. In addition, stringent loan requirements and high interest rates make it difficult for students to secure the necessary capital to launch their businesses. The absence of financial support limits the practical implementation of entrepreneurship skills, resulting in a low success rate of student-led startups.

Outdated Curriculum and Teaching Methods

The entrepreneurship curriculum in many Nigerian public universities has not been updated to reflect modern business trends and technological advancements. According to Nwachukwu and Ojo (2023), many universities still rely on traditional business theories that do not address contemporary challenges such as digital entrepreneurship, e-commerce, and technological innovations. This outdated curriculum limits students' ability to adapt to the evolving business environment. Additionally, the teaching methods used in many universities do not encourage innovation and creativity. Entrepreneurship education should involve interactive sessions, case studies, business simulations, and mentorship programmes. However, the current instructional methods remain largely theoretical, preventing students from developing practical problem-solving skills needed in business.

Poor Infrastructure and Learning Facilities

Entrepreneurship education requires well-equipped training centers, business incubation hubs, and access to digital tools. However, most public universities in Nigeria lack the necessary infrastructure to support effective entrepreneurship training. Inadequate access to modern technology, internet connectivity, and workspace facilities limits students' ability to acquire relevant business skills. Entrepreneurship skills acquisition also requires well-equipped laboratories where students can practice product development, manufacturing processes, and innovation techniques. However, most universities do not have functional business incubation centers where students can test and refine their business ideas before launching them. Without the right infrastructure, students struggle to translate theoretical knowledge into practical business ventures.

Socio-Cultural and Psychological Barriers

Cultural beliefs and societal perceptions about entrepreneurship pose a major challenge to skills acquisition in public universities. Many students are influenced by the societal preference for white-collar jobs, leading to a lack of motivation for entrepreneurship. According to Nwachukwu (2020), some students view entrepreneurship as a last resort rather than a viable career path. This mindset discourages students from actively engaging in entrepreneurship training and skill acquisition. Additionally, fear of business failure prevents many students from taking entrepreneurial risks. Entrepreneurship involves uncertainties, and without the right mentorship and encouragement, students may be reluctant to pursue business ventures. The absence of an entrepreneurial mindset hinders the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education, making it difficult for students to fully engage in skill acquisition.

Lack of Government and Institutional Support

Government policies and institutional support play a crucial role in entrepreneurship skills acquisition. However, many public universities lack structured entrepreneurship development programmes due to poor government intervention. According to Chinwe and Nwosu (2020), government agencies responsible for entrepreneurship development often fail to provide the necessary resources, mentorship programmes, and funding for student entrepreneurs. Additionally, universities do not have well-defined policies for integrating entrepreneurship training into the academic curriculum. Many students are not encouraged to participate in entrepreneurial activities due to the absence of clear institutional frameworks. Without adequate support from government agencies and educational institutions, entrepreneurship education in public universities remains underdeveloped.

Strategies for Entrepreneurship Skills Development in Universities

Entrepreneurship skills development in universities is essential for equipping students with the knowledge, competencies, and mindset required to create and manage successful business ventures. Effective strategies must be implemented to enhance students' entrepreneurial

capabilities, improve self-reliance, and contribute to economic development. The following strategies can strengthen entrepreneurship skills acquisition in universities.

Integration of Practical Entrepreneurship Training into the Curriculum

Entrepreneurship education should go beyond theoretical learning and emphasize practical business experience. Universities need to integrate hands-on training, business simulations, and real-world projects into the curriculum to enhance students' entrepreneurial skills. According to Okonkwo and Amadi (2021), practical exposure enables students to develop problem-solving abilities, risk management strategies, and innovation skills necessary for business success. Moreover, universities should ensure that entrepreneurship courses involve project-based learning, where students create business plans, develop prototypes, and engage in entrepreneurial ventures before graduation. This approach allows students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-life business challenges.

Establishment of Business Incubation Centers

The creation of business incubation centers within universities can provide students with access to mentorship, resources, and funding opportunities. Business incubators help students refine their business ideas, develop products, and test their entrepreneurial ventures in a controlled environment. Incubators play a crucial role in supporting startups by providing workspace, networking opportunities, and advisory services. Additionally, incubation centers can facilitate collaboration between students and experienced entrepreneurs, allowing knowledge transfer and mentorship. Through these centers, students can receive guidance on business development, marketing strategies, and financial management, which are essential for entrepreneurship success.

Strengthening Industry and University Partnerships

Collaboration between universities and industries enhances entrepreneurship education by exposing students to real-world business environments. Universities should establish strong partnerships with business organizations, financial institutions, and government agencies to create internship opportunities, training programmes, and entrepreneurial mentorship. Adebayo and Chukwu (2023) stated that industry-university partnerships enable students to gain insights into market trends, business operations, and technological advancements. Furthermore, universities can invite industry experts as guest lecturers, organize entrepreneurship summits, and facilitate networking events where students can interact with successful entrepreneurs. These engagements provide students with valuable knowledge on how to navigate business challenges and explore innovative opportunities.

Provision of Start-Up Capital and Financial Support

Access to funding is one of the major barriers to entrepreneurship among university students. Universities should create funding opportunities such as grants, low-interest loans, and business competitions to support student-led startups. According to Eze and Udoh (2023), financial support enables students to transform business ideas into viable enterprises, thereby promoting

self-employment and economic growth. Additionally, universities can collaborate with government agencies, private investors, and non-governmental organizations to establish entrepreneurship funding schemes. Providing students with access to capital encourages them to take entrepreneurial risks and develop sustainable business ventures.

Adoption of Digital and Technological Innovations

Entrepreneurship education must incorporate digital skills and technological advancements to prepare students for modern business challenges. Universities should integrate courses on digital marketing, e-commerce, financial technology, and business automation into entrepreneurship training programmes. According to Nwachukwu and Ojo (2023), digital entrepreneurship has become a key driver of economic growth, and students must be equipped with skills to leverage technology for business success. Moreover, universities should provide access to digital tools, software, and online business platforms to help students develop digital business models. Exposure to technology-driven entrepreneurship enhances students' competitiveness in both local and global markets.

Capacity Building for Entrepreneurship Educators

The effectiveness of entrepreneurship education depends on the quality of instructors delivering the training. Universities should invest in the continuous training and development of entrepreneurship educators to ensure they possess both theoretical and practical business knowledge. According to Okafor and Eze (2022), many entrepreneurship lecturers in Nigerian universities lack real-world business experience, limiting their ability to effectively train students. Furthermore, universities should encourage lecturers to participate in business development programmes, entrepreneurial research, and industry engagement. When educators have practical knowledge of entrepreneurship, they can effectively mentor students and provide valuable insights into business success strategies.

Encouragement of Student-Led Entrepreneurial Activities

Universities should create platforms for students to engage in entrepreneurial activities through business clubs, innovation hubs, and startup competitions. Organizing entrepreneurship boot camps, hackathons, and business pitch events enables students to showcase their business ideas and receive constructive feedback from experts. Student-led entrepreneurial initiatives foster creativity, teamwork, and problem-solving skills. Additionally, universities can support student-run businesses by providing access to campus markets, product development resources, and promotional platforms. Creating a business-friendly environment within universities encourages students to take entrepreneurship seriously and gain real-world business experience.

Policy Development and Institutional Support

Government policies and university regulations play a crucial role in promoting entrepreneurship education. Universities should develop clear policies that mandate entrepreneurship training for all students, regardless of their field of study. According to Nwachukwu and Ojo (2023), incorporating entrepreneurship as a core course ensures that students develop business

competencies alongside their academic programmes. Furthermore, government agencies should implement policies that provide financial incentives, tax reliefs, and business grants for student entrepreneurs. Creating a supportive regulatory framework for entrepreneurship education enhances students' ability to start and sustain businesses.

Promotion of Entrepreneurial Mindset and Risk-Taking Culture

Developing an entrepreneurial mindset among students requires exposure to business case studies, success stories, and real-life challenges. Universities should encourage students to embrace creativity, innovation, and calculated risk-taking. Entrepreneurial success depends on resilience, adaptability, and the ability to seize business opportunities. Additionally, universities can implement mentorship programmes where successful entrepreneurs share their experiences, challenges, and business strategies with students. Encouraging students to adopt a proactive and problem-solving approach to entrepreneurship increases their confidence and willingness to explore business opportunities.

CONCLUSION

Entrepreneurship skills acquisition plays a vital role in fostering the economic empowerment of students in public universities in Rivers State. As unemployment continues to pose challenges in Nigeria, the need for self-reliance through entrepreneurship has become more pronounced. Public universities serve as key institutions in equipping students with essential business management, financial literacy, innovation, and problem-solving skills necessary for establishing and sustaining entrepreneurial ventures. Through structured training, mentorship programmes, and business incubation centers, students are provided with opportunities to develop practical competencies that enhance their ability to create sustainable businesses. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, limited infrastructural support, and restricted access to start-up capital remain obstacles to the full realization of entrepreneurship education objectives. Moreover, the economic empowerment of students through entrepreneurship skills acquisition has broader socio-economic implications. Fostering job creation, reducing dependency on white-collar employment, and promoting self-sufficiency, entrepreneurship contributes to economic diversification and poverty alleviation.

Suggestions

To enhance entrepreneurship skills acquisition and economic empowerment of students in public universities in Rivers State, key stakeholders must take proactive measures to create a supportive learning and business environment. The following suggestions outlined the roles of various stakeholders in strengthening entrepreneurship education:

- Ministry of Education should develop and enforce policies that integrate practical entrepreneurship training into university curricula, ensuring that students gain hands-on experience alongside theoretical knowledge.
- Policy Makers should formulate and implement policies that create a conducive environment for student entrepreneurs, including tax incentives for student-led start-ups and simplified business registration processes.

- Government Agencies should collaborate with public universities to provide funding, infrastructure, and other resources that enhance entrepreneurship education and training.
- School Administrators should incorporate entrepreneurship training into various academic programmes, ensuring that students from all disciplines gain exposure to business skills.

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