

Developing 21st Century Entrepreneurial Skills in University Students for Optimum Competence in Oyo State

Olugbade Solomon ADENIRAN

Faculty of Specialised and Professional Education,
Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo, Oyo State
adeniranolugbade64@gmail.com

Rebecca Adenike AFOLABI

Faculty of Specialised and Professional Education,
Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo, Oyo State
afolabira@eauedoyo.edu.ng

Johnson Tunde AJIBOYE

Faculty of Specialised and Professional Education,
Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo, Oyo State
ajiboyejt@eauedoyo.edu.ng

Abstract

The emphasis on entrepreneurship education becomes heightened in the wake of mounting unemployment of teeming youths and graduates of tertiary institutions across the country. Curbing this problem calls for the adoption of a sound and realistic education policy promoting the integration of entrepreneurial skills into the institutions' curriculum. This study examines the concept of competence, entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurial skills and the impact of such skills like creativity, critical thinking, digital literacy skills, learning and innovation skills, problem solving, collaboration, career and life skills on the level of students' competence in selected public universities in Oyo State. The study adopted descriptive research design and three research questions were raised and answered in the study. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 240 respondents from two universities in Oyo State. A 16 – item structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The instrument was validated through experts' opinion and scrutiny from the fields of Educational Management, and Test and Measurements. A reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained through test-retest technique. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics of mean, frequency counts and standard deviations. Findings from the study revealed that entrepreneurship education is crucial to the acquisition of 21st century knowledge and skills such as digital literary skills, problem solving, learning and innovation skills, career life skills, etc., which are currently needed for gainful or self-employment. Hence, the study recommended among others, that the curriculum of the nation's tertiary institutions should be reviewed in such a way to enhance the functional competence of graduates and meet with global best practice. The study also called for the provision of enabling environment to encourage effective teaching and learning and practical manifestation of learned skills.

Keywords: 21st century skills, Competence, Entrepreneurship education, Tertiary institutions, Curriculum

Introduction

The concept of competence is critical to the individual and organisational pursuit of excellence. Such attainment of excellence would help in achieving the organisational set objectives. A competent university graduate would not only be useful to himself but all things being equal would be seen as a resourceful asset to the organisation. According to Vitello, et al. (2021) competence is the ability to integrate and apply contextually – appropriate knowledge, skills and psychosocial factors (e.g. beliefs, attitudes, values and motivations) to consistently perform successfully within a specified domain. Similarly, Hakim (2015) viewed competence as the ability of a person to exercise or perform a job or task that is on skills, knowledge and attitude supported by work in accordance with the demand of the job.

An entrepreneur on the other hand, is a person/one who establishes and manages a business enterprise alongside its attendant risk and gain (Wheelen and Hunger, 2012). In the perception of Enu (2012) entrepreneurial skills give information to students on the abilities and ideas to access and change different opportunities to business creation. Instead of seeking white-collar job, entrepreneurship enables individuals to showcase talents, ideas towards creating new ventures and provide solutions to societal problems (Gibson, 2019). Among the skills that can make an entrepreneur to excel in his career includes but not limited to innovation, vision and risk management which could be nurtured depending on individual perception. Adair (2010) was of the opinion that a successful man/person is one who chooses a vocation that commensurate with his/her interest, perception, aptitudes and countenance. Osinem (2016) posited that graduates in Nigeria do not have the requisite skills for productivity. Hence, the undergraduate students need to collaborate with industries through the school management in organizing seminar and workshop where the resource person would teach the participants in the same trade how to do things and be successful (Audu et al. 2013). Individuals could build the skills needed to maintain employment and up skill for mobility and integration, advancing their careers or growing their businesses. Government introduced the entrepreneurship education into tertiary institutions but the programmes are not very effective to develop graduates to be self-reliant or gainfully employed when they are independent. This perhaps made Anyawu (2010) to declare that the rate at which the youths roam the streets unproductively due to idleness is alarming.

The economic success in the 21st century requires innovation, critical thinking, digital citizenship and creativity (Geisinger, 2016). 21st century skills are therefore needed to synthesize, access and communicate information, it is also needed to solve complex organization problems and collaborative work (Lamb et.al, 2017). The research carried out by Ayatse (2013) enumerated the problems confronting entrepreneurship education among youths of tertiary institutions. He maintained that undergraduates need to be skillful in this digital age in order to meet the various challenges in the labour market. Odia and Odia (2013) posited that when youth obtain training and re-training from various entrepreneurship programmes it would be of use and act as weapon/skill to promote self-reliance and as the business progresses he/she can become employer of labour.

In a study carried out by Mohammed (2017), it was revealed that no nation can progress technologically, economically, politically even industrially without strongly developing entrepreneurial skills which minimizes reduction in unemployment rate. Similarly, Adegbesan (2021) asserted that higher education should pursue a policy to encourage entrepreneurial innovation to ensure the creation of expertise, the development of new industries and the empowering of students to establish themselves within an entrepreneurial innovative culture. It is equally true that blending with 21st century entrepreneurial skills gives students room to demonstrate internal cognitive skills and transform their knowledge from illusion to reality. However, the reality from Nigerian educational system proved otherwise. As rightly observed by Adeniran (2019) tertiary education system in Nigeria has failed to inculcate in the youths the philosophy of self-reliance and this has led to wastages in human and natural resources.

Conceptual clarifications: The following concepts are briefly explained for better understanding of the topic.

Competence: Competence refers to effectiveness or ability of anyone concerned to apply the acquired knowledge and skill to achieve desired results (Akintola, 2013). Competence can also be viewed as the possession of a series of desirable attributes including knowledge of appropriate sorts, skills and abilities and as problem solving, analysis, communication, pattern recognition etc. and attitudes of appropriate kinds (Hayer & Gonczi, 1990). According to Hakim (2015), competence is the ability of a person to exercise or perform a job or task that is based on skills, knowledge and attitudes supported by work in accordance with the demand of the job.

. The word competence has various conceptions and approaches depending on the authors and the angle from which the term is being considered. Hager et al. (1996) refers to competence as the effectiveness or ability of anyone concerned to apply the acquired knowledge of appropriate sorts, skills and abilities such as problem solving, analysis, communication, pattern recognition e.t.c. and attitudes of appropriate kinds. Today, the term competence is attracting attention as a key focus of international debates on learning, curricular and assessment within general education (European Commission, 2019; OECD, 2017; UNESCO, 2016 cited Vitello et al. 2021).

Entrepreneurship education: The term entrepreneurship has assumed a more recent view that seems to have departed from the traditional conception of seeking out and identifying investment opportunities, creating new and innovative business enterprises and taking risks to make a profit. According to Banabo and Ndiomu (2011), the term had been extended in more recent years to cover such areas as a socio-cultural, political and educational form of entrepreneurial activities. Entrepreneurship education is focused on developing individuals with the passion and multiple skills. By its scope, nature and characteristics, entrepreneurship education is a rebranding education culture meant to guarantee a comprehensive educational system re-engineering arising from the obvious deficiencies of the existing education system (Enu, 2012). In the words of Albert et al. (2004), entrepreneurship education is the structured and formal conveyance of entrepreneurship competencies which in turn refer to the concept skills and mental awareness used by an individual during the process of starting, developing and managing their growth-oriented ventures. According to Oguntimehin and Nwosu (2014) entrepreneurship education has been identified as a major means of assisting the youths and evens adults to acquire the desired skills and capacities to be self-reliant or self-employed, particularly, to prepare to be able to set up their ventures and manage them profitably. Eke, Igresi and Orji (2012), described entrepreneurship education as providing students with the knowledge, skills and motivation to encourage entrepreneurial success in a variety of settings. Hence, an entrepreneur can be viewed as an innovative individual who has developed an ongoing business venture where none existed before (Arogundade, 2010).

21st Century Entrepreneurial Skills: Set of abilities that students need to develop in order to succeed in the information age. 21st century skills refers to a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that are believed by educators, school reformers employers, and

others to be critically important to success in today's world, particularly in contemporary careers and workplaces (Glossary of Education Reform, 2016 cited by Eneogu et al., n.d). Furthermore, the authors asserted that the skills have always been important for students, though they are particularly important in the current information-based economy. For this study, entrepreneurial skills shall be considered under the following sub-headings: (a) Learning and innovation skills (communication, critical thinking, creativity, innovation, problem-solving and teamwork skills); (b) Digital literacy skills (information literacy, media literacy and technological literacy skills); (c) Career life skills (adaptability, flexibility, initiative, leadership, productivity and social skills).

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study was to examine entrepreneurial skills as a predictor of Oyo State university undergraduate students' competence. Specifically, the study sought to:

- a) Investigate the impact of learning and innovation skills on the level of students' competence in Oyo State public universities.
- b) Examine the impact of digital literacy skills on the level of students' competence in Oyo State public universities.
- c) Examine the impact of career life skills on the level of students' competence in Oyo State public universities.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised and answered in the study.

1. What is the impact of learning and innovation skills (communication, critical thinking, creativity, innovation, problem-solving and teamwork) on the level of students' competence in Oyo State public universities?
2. What is the impact of digital literacy skills (information literacy, media literacy, and technological literacy) on the level of students' competence in Oyo State public universities?

3. What is the impact of career life skills (adaptability, flexibility, initiative, leadership, productivity and social skills) on the level of students' competence in Oyo State public universities?

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey research design was considered appropriate for this study because the researchers used questionnaire to gather relevant data. Three research questions were raised and answered in the study. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 240 respondents from two universities in Oyo State. A 16 – item structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The instrument was subjected to face and content validity through experts' opinion and scrutiny from the fields of Educational Management, and Test and Measurements. A reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained through test-retest technique. The population of this study consists of final year university students of Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH), Ogbomoso and University of Ibadan from where 120 final year students were randomly selected from each university. One researchers' designed instrument tagged "Entrepreneurial skills and Students' Competence Questionnaire" (ESSCQ) was used to collect data for the study. Data collected were analysed with the use of descriptive statistics of frequency counts, percentages, mean and standard deviation.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the impact of learning and innovation skills (communication, critical thinking, creativity, innovation, problem-solving and teamwork) on the level of students' competence in Oyo State public universities?

Table 1: Mean rating of the impact of learning and innovation skills on the level of students' competence in Oyo State

S/N	Items	Mean (X)	S.D	Remarks
1.	Inadequate communication skills in schools' curriculum affects students' competence	2.32	0.75	Not Accepted
2.	Exclusion of critical thinking skills in schools' curriculum affects students' competence and employability	2.19	0.83	Not Accepted

3.	Lack of adequate creativity skill in schools' curriculum affects students' competence	1.42	0.41	Not Accepted
4.	There is less emphasis on innovative techniques and skills in schools' curriculum	2.16	0.85	Not Accepted
5.	Problem solving approach is not prioritized in schools' curriculum	3.43	1.19	Accepted
6.	Teamwork spirit is hardly encouraged during the teaching-learning process	1.67	0.52	Not Accepted
N = 240; Criterion Mean = 2.50				

As indicated in Table 1, items numbered 1 – 4 and 6 with mean scores below 2.50 disagreed with the statements that communication, critical thinking, creativity, innovative and teamwork skills are not prioritized or given prominence in the schools' curriculum. However, items 5 on problem solving with mean score of 3.43 was accepted as one of the skills being overlooked in entrepreneurial studies. From all indications, item 5 appeared to be one of the most critical entrepreneurial skills that have been neglected.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of digital literacy skills (information literacy, media literacy, and technological literacy) on the level of students' competence in Oyo State public universities?

Table 2: Mean rating of the impact of digital literacy skills on the level of students' competence in Oyo State.

S/N	Items	Mean (X)	S.D	Remarks
1.	There is insufficient exposure of students' to information literacy skills	1.34	0.46	Not Accepted
2.	Media literacy skills are not effectively developed among the students	1.27	0.41	Not Accepted
3.	Students are not sufficiently exposed to technological literacy skills	2.21	0.63	Not Accepted
4.	There is lack of synergy between the acquired entrepreneurial skills and the world of work	2.98	1.17	Accepted
N = 240, Criterion Mean = 2.50				

Table 2 indicated that items numbered 1-3 and with mean scores below 2.50 disagreed with the statements that information, media and technological literacy skills are not effectively developed among university undergraduates. Hence the statements are not accepted. However, item 2 with mean score of 2.98 was accepted. It emphasised the lack of synergy between the acquired entrepreneurial skills and the world of work.

Research Question 3: What is the impact of career life skills (adaptability, flexibility, initiative, leadership, productivity and social skills) on the level of students' competence in Oyo State public universities?

Table 3: Mean rating of the impact of career life skills on the level of students' competence in Oyo State.

S/N	Items	Mean (X)	S.D	Remarks
1.	Adaptability skills are not well developed among the students	3.24	1.27	Accepted
2.	The curriculum does not emphasised the integration of flexibility skills into students' learning	2.88	1.12	Accepted
3.	Initiative skills are not adequately promoted among the students	1.54	0.58	Not Accepted
4.	There is little emphasis on leadership skills and qualities in the entrepreneurial courses	2.11	0.72	Not Accepted
5.	Productivity skills are not given enough prominence in students' learning	3.20	1.29	Accepted
6.	Social skills are not properly developed among the students	2.97	1.16	Accepted
N = 240;		Criterion Mean = 2.50		

Table 3 indicated that items numbered 1-2 and 5-6 with mean scores above 2.50 agreed with the statements that adaptability, flexibility, productivity and social skills have not been properly integrated into the schools' curriculum and entrepreneurial studies. However, items numbered 3-4 with mean scores below 2.50 disagreed with the statements that initiative and leadership skills are not emphasized in students' course of studies.

Discussions of Findings

Findings from the study indicated that majority of the students are already exposed to most of the entrepreneurial skills. These skills include communication, critical thinking, creativity, innovative techniques and teamwork spirit. Others are information literacy, media literacy, technological literacy, initiatives and leadership skills. From the foregoing, one would have expected that Nigerian university students would become sufficiently equipped to conveniently fit into the current world of work and meet the rising challenges of the information driven knowledge economy. The reverse, however is the case. Reasons for this development are not far-fetched as the responses indicated that some equally important skills are not given the needed prominence in the scheme of things. The skills include problem solving, adaptability, flexibility, productivity and social skills. It was equally agreed that there was lack of synergy between the skills claimed to have been acquired and the world of work. This perhaps made Adegbesan et al. (2021) to argue that there still remains the challenge of complete academic legitimacy despite the huge expansion of entrepreneurship education in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. In the same vein, Adeniran (2019) opined that lack of political will and inconsistencies in government policies make it difficult to sustain most entrepreneurship development efforts put in place by the government. He stated further that Nigeria as a nation has recorded little or no success in most of the entrepreneurial initiatives undertaking, unlike in developed nations of the world where entrepreneurship has been used to inculcate the innovative spirit and stimulate creative potentials among the youths.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Entrepreneurship education and effective acquisition and utilization of entrepreneurial skills has the potential to promote the functional competence of Nigeria's universities' graduates and position the nation to meet the challenges of a rapidly changing digital economy. To this extent, the following recommendations are made:

- i) The curriculum of the nation's tertiary institutions should be reviewed in such a way to sharpen the universities graduates' potentials, skills and competence to meet with global best practice.

- ii) Meaningful and realistic education policy backing the entrepreneurship education courses at all level of university education programmes (including polytechnics) should be formulated.
- iii) Hence, it becomes very imperative to create an enabling environment for the effective acquisition of necessary entrepreneurial skills which are currently needed for today's global economy.
- iv) There should be appropriate synergy and linkage between what is taught at school and the world of work. This will enable graduates meet up with the challenges of fast changing labour market or becomes sufficiently self-employed and self-reliant.

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