

Assessing the Impact of Entrepreneurship Education on the Entrepreneurial Intention of Nigerian Entrepreneurship Students

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of entrepreneurship education on the entrepreneurial intentions (EI) of students enrolled at the Department of Entrepreneurship and Business Studies located in the Federal University of Technology Minna, Nigeria. It employed a cross-section survey design using a questionnaire adapted from Turker & Selcuk (2009). A comparison of the mean EI scores of 82 final-year and 68 second-year students revealed that there was no significant difference in entrepreneurial intentions between the two groups of students. This implied that the curriculum of the department needed to be revised, and that a policy of mandating entrepreneurship education at the university level was insufficient to address the alarming youth unemployment problem in Nigeria.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial intentions; entrepreneurship education; Nigeria; university students; youth unemployment

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INTRODUCTION

Saturday, 15th of March 2014 was a dark day in Nigerian youth unemployment history. 500,000 young graduates had gathered in five centers across the country to write an aptitude test for just 4,556 available government jobs (Ajijah & Isine, 2014). Sadly stampedes across the five centers led to the loss of 16 young lives whose bright futures would never be realized (VOA News, 2014). The incidents of that sad day revealed that youth unemployment in Nigeria not only led to social problems but to actual loss of life (Okoh, 2014; Akanle & Omotayo, 2019; Chinwokwu & Michael, 2019).

The problem of youth unemployment in Nigeria is one that has grown steadily over the last decade as evidenced by the following statistic: From 2007 to 2017, youth unemployment in Nigeria had grown from 9.85% to 13.41% (Statista, 2019). One strategy the Nigerian government has developed to help address this problem has been entrepreneurship education

(Akinboade, 2014; Ojo, 2019; Olalekan & Gbeminiyi, 2019), and it is the impact of this strategy that this study sought to investigate.

In 2014, the then Minister of Education, Mr Ibrahim Shekerau, announced that entrepreneurship was now a mandatory course for all students in institutes of higher education (Akinboade, 2014; Adegboye et al., 2016; Dakung et al., 2017). The objective of this policy was to equip all university students with the necessary entrepreneurship skills and knowledge so that upon graduation they could establish their own businesses instead of relying upon limited government jobs (Zubairu et al., 2016; Afolabi et al., 2017; Udoeye & Mba, 2017).

In assessing the impact of this policy, an important concept to consider is students' entrepreneurial intentions (EI). In the context of university students, EI is defined as the willingness of a student to establish his or her own business upon graduation (Shah & Soomro, 2017; Aderibigbe,

Mahola, & Chimucheka, 2019; Esfandiar et al., 2019). The expectation of the Nigerian government is that mandatory entrepreneurship education will enhance the entrepreneurial intentions of university students which hopefully will translate into a good proportion of them establishing their own businesses after graduation. An important assumption in this expectation is that entrepreneurship education enhances entrepreneurial intention. Is there empirical support for this assumption?

To answer this question, this study conducted an empirical review of recent studies that investigated the impact of entrepreneurship education on the entrepreneurial intentions of university students. The review revealed that the vast majority of previous studies found that there was a positive relationship between entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurial intentions of students: from China (Cai & Kong, 2017; Ni & Ye, 2018; Lin et al., 2019) to India (Bhat & Singh, 2018); from Indonesia (Utami, 2017; Pratama, 2019) to Iran (Jahani et al., 2017); from Korea (Yang, 2017; Bae et al., 2017) to Malaysia (Mamun et al., 2017); from Ghana (Pedrini et al., 2017) to Nigeria (Hassan & Hassan, 2017; Aladejebi, 2018), and finally from Romania (Frunzaru & Cismaru, 2018) and Spain (Barba-Sánchez & Atienza-Sahuquillo, 2018; Ferrandiz et al., 2018). Only three of the studies reviewed found no relationship between entrepreneurship education and EI: Jie & Harms (2017) from the Netherlands, Ngah & Osman (2017) from Malaysia and Putra, Tridayanti, and Sukoco (2018) from Indonesia. It is thus reasonable to conclude that there is significant empirical support for the assumption that entrepreneurship education will have a positive impact on the EI of university students.

Another observation from the review of prior EI studies is that the majority of recent studies took place in Asia (for example, Cai & Kong, 2017; Bhat & Singh, 2018; Pratama, 2019). Additionally the two Nigerian studies reviewed (Hassan & Hassan, 2017; Aladejebi, 2018) all took place in the South-Western part of the country. This study addresses the sample imbalance by focusing on the North-Central part of Nigeria which is typically considered educationally-disadvantaged and economically impoverished as compared to the South-West (Ehiane & Mngomezulu, 2018; Kontagora et al., 2018; Uhumuavbi & Onojerena, 2018). The need for the development of vibrant entrepreneurship in this part of the country is thus much greater than in the South-West, and this study provides an important first step at how well this policy is working in developing future entrepreneurs.

Specifically, this study investigates the impact of entrepreneurship education on the entrepreneurial intentions (EI) of students enrolled at the Department of Entrepreneurship and Business Studies in the Federal University of Technology Minna, Niger State located in North-Central Nigeria. The Department was established in 2009, five years before it was mandatory for all universities to offer entrepreneurship studies, and thus can be considered the pioneering

entrepreneurship program in the entire country (Federal University of Technology Minna, 2019). To assess the impact of entrepreneurship education on the EI of these students, the EI of final year students was measured and compared with the EI of second-year students. It was expected that the EI of final-year students who had basically completed the entire entrepreneurship curriculum would be significantly higher than those of second-year students who had only recently started the entrepreneurship program.

METHOD

Research Design

This study adopted a cross-section survey design to achieve its objective. Specifically, all second-year and final-year students enrolled at the Department of Entrepreneurship and Business Studies, Federal University of Technology Minna were targeted for this study. A self-administered questionnaire was given to the students during mandatory courses in order to ensure that all enrolled students were present at the time of data collection. The questionnaire was used to obtain demographic information as well as the entrepreneurial intentions of the students surveyed. In total, 150 students were surveyed, 82 final-year students and 68 second-year students. The mean EI scores for both sets of students were then compared using an independent samples *t*-test.

Instrument

The questionnaire utilized in this study had two sections: A and B. Section A focused on obtaining demographic information about the students (Level of study, Age, Gender and Marital status), while section B required students to state their level of agreement or disagreement with three statements based on a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly disagree – Strongly agree). The three statements were used to measure the students' entrepreneurial intentions, and were as follows: 1) The education I have received from the department has encouraged me to develop creative entrepreneurial ideas, 2) The department has provided me with necessary knowledge about entrepreneurship, and 3) The department has developed my entrepreneurial skills and abilities. The three statements were adapted from the instrument developed by Turker & Selcuk (2009).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the two sets of entrepreneurship students surveyed in this study.

Table 1 – Demographic characteristics of respondents

	Final-year students N = 82	Second-year students N = 68
Age:		
15-20	4	30
21-25	51	33
26-30	23	3
31-35	4	0
Gender:		
Male	47	37
Female	35	31
Marital status:		
Single	75	67
Married	7	1

It can be observed from Table 1 that for both sets of students, the majority of students were between the ages of 21 and 25 years, 51 out of 82 for the final-year students, and 33 out of 68 for the second-year students. Similarly, both sets of students had more males than females, 47 out of 82 for final-year students, and 37 out of 68 for the second-year students. The pattern continues in terms of marital status with almost all the students being single, 75 out of 82 for final-year students and 67 out of 68 for second-year students.

A comparison of the mean EI scores of both sets of students ($\text{sig} = 0.083$) revealed that there was no significant difference between the entrepreneurial intentions of second-year entrepreneurship students and final-year students of the Department of Entrepreneurship and Business Studies at the Federal University of Technology Minna. This finding has several implications which shall be discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

The first implication is that this study's results goes against the findings of most prior studies that explored the relationship between entrepreneurship education and students' entrepreneurial intentions (c.f. Hassan & Hassan, 2017; Ni & Ye, 2018; Lin et al., 2019). These prior studies all found that entrepreneurship education has a positive impact on entrepreneurial intentions, whilst this study did not. This is one of the important aspects of research: results tend to be dependent on the specific context and are generally not universally applicable.

A possible explanation as to why entrepreneurship education was seen to have a positive impact on students' entrepreneurial intentions in other countries but not in Nigeria could be attributed to the unique psychology that is prevalent in Nigerian society. Decades of rampant corruption and nepotism has made many Nigerians believe that the only way to become successful is to know someone in a position of power and influence who can provide job opportunities once one graduates from university (Babatunde, 2018; Fasiku & Alumona, 2018; Idike et al., 2019). Many Nigerians do not actually believe that

entrepreneurship is a viable career alternative after graduation (Kolade, 2018; Lawal et al., 2018; Ndagi, 2018). This explanation is further strengthened by the fact that Nigeria lacks the conducive environment to actually foster the creation and growth of entrepreneurial ventures (Ezeagba, 2017; Oladimeji, Eze, & Akani., 2018; Okon, 2018): electricity is epileptic at best (Kolawole et al., 2019; Olowosejeje, Leahi, & Morrison, 2019; Samuel & Ayeni, 2019); the road networks are exceedingly poor and littered with pot-holes (Chakamera & Alagidede, 2018; Iyanda et al., 2018; Olowogbon et al., 2019); pipe-borne water is a luxury (Abubakar, 2018; Ogbuabor & Onwujekwe, 2018; Simukonda et al., 2018); new ventures are plagued with multiple taxes from various government agencies (Ede, 2018; Asongu & Odhiambo, 2019; Okpala et al., 2019); access to crucial start-up capital is extremely limited for new ventures (Anosike, 2018; Hansen et al., 2018; Oladimeji & Aina, 2018), and Nigerians do not trust in locally-made products, preferring to purchase imported goods which they perceive as been of higher quality due to stringent quality control standards present in these countries that are absent in Nigeria (Vadakepat, 2015).

A second implication of this finding is that the Department of Entrepreneurship and Business Studies needs to review the contents of its entrepreneurship curriculum vis-à-vis its effectiveness in achieving the department's motto of knowledge through self-reliance. The results show that according to the respondents, the contents of the present curriculum were not truly enhancing the entrepreneurial intentions of students. As some of the authors of this paper are lecturers of the department, it is strongly recommended that more experiential styles of teaching as well as more hands-on business and entrepreneurship training be included in the curriculum. This result is not surprising given that the Nigerian educational setting tends to give a lot of priority to theoretical learning and memorization, rather than actual application of knowledge (Onwuagboke Singh, and Fook, 2015; Etuk & Bello, 2016; Aina & Ayodele, 2018). The reality is that entrepreneurship knowledge with practical application is not very useful in creating budding entrepreneurs who will be excited to face the challenges of starting and running their own business (Ahmad, Bakar, & Ahmad, 2018; Seet et al., 2018; Lang & Liu, 2019). There thus needs to be a change in mindset of the entire Nigerian educational system: from the mere pursuit of certificates to actual knowledge enhancement and practical application of such knowledge.

A third implication of this study's results is that the Nigerian government must understand that mandating entrepreneurship education is not sufficient to address the growing problem of youth unemployment in the country. There is no guarantee that this policy will ensure that students' entrepreneurial intentions will be enhanced enough for them to establish their own businesses upon graduation. Additionally, even if this policy is effective

in some cases as shown by Hassan & Hassan (2017) and Aladejebi (2018), as alluded to earlier, the government must create a conducive environment for business start-ups by providing the necessary entrepreneurial infrastructure such as steady electricity, good roads, easy access to affordable finance and business support facilities. Youth unemployment in Nigeria is a multi-faceted problem that requires a combination of policy initiatives.

An examination of other countries where entrepreneurship education has proved effective in enhancing students' entrepreneurial intentions provides evidence of this fact. All these countries take basic amenities like stable electricity and good roads for granted. It is not something new businesses have to be concerned about. This is true even for transitional countries like Malaysia and Brazil. Additionally, these countries take the important step of supporting MSME development by providing these small businesses with access to cheap credit via grants and loans; classic examples include the Small Business Administration in the United States of America (Dahlstrom & Talmage, 2018; Friedman & Carmeli, 2018; Armstrong, Shieh, & Zielinski, 2019), and the Small Business Financing Program in Canada (Morgan, Sui, & Baum, 2018; Bertoni, Marti, & Reverte, 2019; Park et al., 2019).

A fourth implication of this study's results is that despite global diffusion of entrepreneurship as an important concept for economic development, it is not a 'magic solution' that will solve all of Nigeria's youth employment problems. The Nigerian government has to be much more proactive in develop different strategies to solve the myriad of problems plaguing the country, one of which is of course youth unemployment. One such economic development strategy that has found great success in America is the concept of economic gardening.

Economic gardening is a developmental approach that seeks to develop an economy in a gradual and sustainable manner by harnessing the resources within the country and providing tremendous support for the growth and expansion of local businesses (Taabazuing, Arku, & Mkandawire, 2015; Mazzarol & Clark, 2016; Overbey, 2019). First developed in the 1980s by Chris Gibbons in the town of Littleton, Colorado, it was adopted by many other states in the country due to its effectiveness in creating new jobs and ensuring continued development of the economy over time (Breazeale et al., 2015; Assenza, 2016). It is a policy departure from the usual strategy of trying to attract foreign investment into a country, which is a strategy Nigeria has usually relied upon. This study posits that it is about time that the Nigerian government looks to develop its economy from within rather than constantly relying on outsiders to help them develop, or simply relying on entrepreneurship education alone as a solution to youth unemployment.

CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated the impact of entrepreneurship education on the entrepreneurial intentions of students enrolled at the Department of Entrepreneurship and Business Studies located in the Federal University of Technology Minna, Nigeria. A comparison of the mean EI scores of final-year and second-year students revealed that there was no significant difference in entrepreneurial intentions between the two groups of students. This implied that the curriculum of the department needed to be revised, and that a policy of mandating entrepreneurship education at the university level was insufficient to address the alarming youth unemployment problem in Nigeria.

Despite the importance of this result as emphasized by the three key implications discussed in the preceding section, the study was not without its limitations. The first limitation was the fact that only students from one university were surveyed. This affects the generalizability of the finding. Nigeria has six geo-political zones, and future studies should include universities from each zone so as to provide a more holistic assessment of the impact of the government's policy to mandate entrepreneurship education in all institutions of higher learning. Another limitation of this study was the fact that it relied only on a survey. Future studies should combine a survey with interviews of some students so as to get different perspectives of the impact of entrepreneurship education on the entrepreneurial intentions of these students. A third limitation of this study is the actual use of entrepreneurial intention as a proxy for students' actually starting new businesses after graduation. Future studies should attempt to find out how many students actually establish businesses after graduation, and how long this businesses last. This would provide a much better picture of the impact of this government policy on youth unemployment in Nigeria.

As mentioned in the introductory section of this paper, Nigerian youth have actually died due to unemployment. It is thus incumbent on the Nigerian government, private business, international NGOs and all other stakeholders to work together to establish multiple policies to combat this growing problem. Only when this problem is reduced to the barest minimum can Nigeria truly become 'the giant of Africa'.

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