ACQUISITION OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP CORE-SKILLS AND SELF-EMPLOYABILITY OF UNIVERSITY GRADUATES' IN NORTH-CENTRAL NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Globalization of knowledge economy has made acquisition of entrepreneurship education very imperative for undergraduates in Nigerian universities. The need for the students to be equipped with entrepreneurship core skills acquisition cannot be overemphasized to reduce unemployment to the barest minimum if not completely eradicated. However, the graduates of Nigerian universities are not trained to be self-reliant, innovative and creative, but with mindset to depend solely on white collar jobs after graduation for sustenance. Thus, the study examined entrepreneurship core-skills acquisition and public university graduates' self-employability in North-Central Nigeria. Descriptive research design was adopted for this study. The population of the study comprised 11 directors of entrepreneurship training centers of public universities of North-Central, Nigeria and the 400 level students of the public university North-Central, Nigeria. Proportional random sampling technique was used to select eight public universities. Questionnaire instrument titled "Entrepreneurship Training Questionnaires (ETQ) and Core-Skills Acquisition Questionnaire (CSAQ) were used to collected data for the study. Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions raised in the study. The findings of the study

revealed that communication skills has highest mean of 4.24, followed by vocational skills with the mean of 2.76 while managerial skills acquisition has the lowest with the mean of 2.42. The level of graduates self employability was low. It was recommended among others that university administrators should partner with the community in entrepreneurship training programmes that will make the university graduates become job creators and employers of labour as against job seekers.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Core Skills Acquisition and Graduate Self Employability

Introduction

Entrepreneurship training is a leeway to unravel or reduce the unemployment state in the country with adequate theoretical, vocational and practical training. It has the mandate to equip the youth with functional knowledge and skills to build up their characters, attitudes and visions. Moreover, it has vital role in developing eco-system that enhances innovations (European Union, 2016). The objectives of entrepreneurship training are; to provide practical training to the youths for them to become self-sufficient in their respective life and serve as catalyst for economic development; to equip the youth(students) with suitable training for creativity and innovation in term of identifying great enterprise opportunities; to create jobs and employment benefits for the citizenry and reduce the rural-urban answerable migration; and to balance regional development and increase in growth and development programme and per capital income. Akudolu (2015) emphasized the need for students to acquire and exploit among others, such entrepreneurial skills and capacities as; resourcefulness, innovation, creativity, ingenious, self-motivated, risk daring, endurance, willingness to accept positive and negative results of life ventures, dynamic and management ability. In this regard, entrepreneurship is the ability to cogitate creatively and become effective problem solver.

To achieve these objectives, the students need to acquire core-skills needed for them to be creators of job/employment for themselves and other citizens through adequate vocational training and managerial skills acquisition, these can only be achieved when and if entrepreneurship training is done properly as it is ought to be done and resources are put in places. The universities are the main agent for developing these graduates or would be entrepreneurs. However, in some of the universities in North-central, Nigeria, there is inadequate entrepreneurial training course curriculum as many of the universities do not have appropriate workshops for entrepreneurship training as well as qualified lecturers or trainers. These observations tally with Beckley (2018) who pointed out that poor societal attitude to technical and vocational training, development and insufficient trainers or little knowledge of entrepreneurship by the university lecturers, insufficient fund for the programme by the universities' administrators and unimpressive enterprising culture are among the challenges facing entrepreneurship training, skills acquisition and employment creation in Nigeria.

The issues of graduate unemployment continued to soar high and constituted a major challenge to the Nigeria as a nation with 7.53 million unemployed youths in 2017 (Esemouya &

Nwawu, 2017). This is largely due to the defective curricula of the universities and other tertiary schools with emphasis on training for white-collar jobs. The institutions of higher education in Nigeria failed to meet the employment requirements of its teeming graduates. Monumental increase occurred despite the fact that all tiers of governments as well as the organised private sectors, (OPS), generated additional 1.2 million jobs, which thus put the estimated labour population at 85.1 per cent for the same period. The graduates' unemployment seems unbearable, therefore the National University Commission (NUC) introduced and mandated in the universities curriculum a course tittled" Graduates Self-Employment' (GSE) in 2007. This scenario has prompted the government of Nigeria into developing a plan agenda on entrepreneurship training for youths which consequently resulted to the emergence of the national directorate of employment (NDE) in 1986 and the work for yourself programme in 1987 that centered on training and financial assistance to entrepreneurs. In an attempt to fill this lacuna, various programmes were introduced by the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) among which were: Entrepreneurship Development Programme (EDP), National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWIN) and NPower among others (Owoseni, 2019).

However, the youths were threatened with the challenge of non- acquainted with sound knowledge of entrepreneurship and fundamental skills required to excel as entrepreneurs. There are more than 150 universities and 50 polytechnics and monotechnics in Nigeria that turn out graduates year in year out, thereby increasing the level of joblessness in Nigeria. This is mainly because graduates are not trained to be self-reliant, innovative and creative enough to be able to become self-employed, but with mindset to depend solely on white collar jobs after graduation for sustenance. As a result, there are several graduates from Nigerian universities currently who are disappointedly not gainfully employed. Apart from the book knowledge that they gained, there have no requisite core-skills needed to make them self-dependent. Thus, the study examined entrepreneurship core-skills acquisition and public university graduates' self-employability in North-central Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

1. Examined the available entrepreneurship training programmes in public university in North-Central Nigeria
2. Investigated the entrepreneurship core-skills acquired by students of public university in North-Central Nigeria.
3. The level of public university graduates' self-employability in North-Central Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. How available are entrepreneurship training in public university in North-Central Nigeria?
2. What are the core skills acquired by students of public universities, North-central, Nigeria?
3. What is the level of graduates' self-employability in public universities, North-Central, Nigeria?

Literature Review

Entrepreneurship training is a lifelong learning process that start from elementary school gradually through all levels of education by building the appropriate objective based on what one desires to be in life depending on interest and talents of the individual. Owoseni (2019) asserted that entrepreneurial training is a special training given to students of vocational and technical education to acquire skills, ideas and managerial abilities and capacities for self-employment rather than being employed for pay. Osuala (2017) opined that entrepreneurship training is a programme or part of a programme that prepare individuals to be able to undertake the formation and or operate small business enterprises which also includes franchise operations for the purpose of performing all business functions relating to a product or service with emphasis on social responsibilities, legal requirements and risks for the sake of profit involved in the conduct of private business enterprises. The ultimate goal of the entrepreneurship centre is to be equipped to meet up and cope with challenges of unemployment as well as poverty by being self-reliant. Students were expected to be active in practical work of projects, in groups and individually (Nwaigburu, etal, 2013)

Extant studies have been conducted on entrepreneurship core-skills acquisition and public university graduates' self-employability in North-central Nigeria. Ikpesu (2014) examined the acceptance and adoption of entrepreneurship education as a multi-disciplinary approach in all Nigerian universities curriculum for the development of the needed entrepreneurial human capital. A sample of 300 graduates currently under-going their mandatory National youth service corps in Portharcort, River state, having entrepreneurship education background prior to graduation in their various universities and entrepreneurship training program during orientation camp were selected. The constructed instrument titled “entrepreneurial human capital and graduates economic future questionnaire” was analysed with descriptive statistics. The findings revealed some socio-economic implication of entrepreneurial human capital development as wealth creation, employment generation, increasing life expectancy and living standard, poverty and crime reduction which have direct impact on the national economy. It was however recommended that educators should use teaching methodologies that will specifically enable future graduates acquire essential employable skills and develop strong entrepreneurial character of ownership mentality, autonomy and independence whichis in complete favour for the private enterprises.

Chiacha and Amaechi (2013) conducted study on entrepreneurship education and graduate employability in Nigeria. descriptive survey design was used on 220 employers of labour and 100 university graduates in Nigeria. That was selected through a multistage sampling technique. Therein three research questions and two hypotheses guided the study. Mean, standard deviation, Chi square and multivariate regressions were together employed for data analysis. Nine employability skills were found to be required by Nigerian employers. The study also found out that the entrepreneurial education currently offered did not lead to high employability index. The study thereby recommended that there should be a paradigm shift in the content used in entrepreneurship education delivery in Nigeria.

Ediagbonya and Oyadongha (2013) carried out a survey on employability skills among post graduate student of business education in Edo state. The study investigated the concept of employability of business education graduates. Human capital theory which was popularised by Schultz formed the theoretical frame work for this study the main purpose of this work was to ascertain the mean ratings of employability skills possessed by business education graduate. Four research questions were raised to guide the study and three hypotheses were formulated. The case study research design was adopted for this study. The systematic random sampling was used in selecting 60 respondents from the population of 130. The questionnaire titled 'Employability of Business Education Graduate Questionnaire (EBEGQ)' was used in eliciting information from the students. The researcher together with the research assistant administered the instrument. The mean, standard deviation percentage, frequency and tables were used in analysing the data. One of the findings was that business education graduate employability skills was high. A major recommendation made was that shorthand and typing teachers should be encouraged to be more active in imparting these skills.

Olumese and Clark (2015) examined the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education as a general course in a university in south-south zone of Nigeria, Benin and Edo State. The population of their study comprised 65 final year students of the department of vocational and technical education, university of Benin, Benin-City. They adopted the survey research design for the study and used a 22-items structured questionnaire to elicit the data. The study was guided by six research questions and one hypothesis while the mean and standard deviation were employed to analyse the data gathered in respect of six research questions and t-test technique for testing the formulated null hypothesis at0.05level of significance. The study revealed that entrepreneurship education as a general studies course is adequately offered and that the objectives are goal oriented and achievable but facilities required and equipment needed are grossly inadequate for effective teaching and learning. More so, lecture method was the most employed than teaching method but had low level of motivation resulting from lack of practical training opportunities. Arising from the findings, they recommended that adequate facilities/materials should be provided to expose students to practical opportunities and that they should equally be expose to varying teaching methods to enhance learning.

Ezemoyih and Nwaiwu (2017) undertook a study on procedure for effective teaching of entrepreneurship education in tertiary institutions in Imo and Anambra States. They adopted the survey design method on a population of 210 teachers teaching entrepreneurship courses. They used 14-items structured questionnaire to gather the required data. One research question and one hypothesis guided the study. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistic of mean and standard deviation and the hypothesis was tested using the t-test technique at 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed that appropriate organisation of learning and materials will guarantee effective teaching and learning of entrepreneurship courses in tertiary institutions. The study recommended that frequent workshops and conferences, seminars, and in-service training should be organised by authorities to improve the appropriate teaching of entrepreneurship

education. There again, the study reviewed looked at the strategies for effective teaching of entrepreneurship course which is an aspect of entrepreneurship education but the current study took a holistic approach to determine the status of entrepreneurship training and skills acquired by North-central public university graduates.

Methodology

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design The population of the study comprised 11 directors of entrepreneurship training centres of public universities of North-Central, Nigeria and the 400 level students of the public university North-central, Nigeria. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select eight public universities comprised Federal and States, these are; University of Ilorin. Kwara State University, Malete. Federal University of Technology, Minna. Ibrahim Gbadamonsi Babangida University, Lafia. Federal University Lokoja. Kogi State University, Anyingba. Federal University Lafia, and Nasarawa State University. Entrepreneurship Training Questionnaires (ETQ) and Core-Skills Acquisition Questionnaire (CSAQ) were used to collected data for the study**.** Also**,** Secondary data were used to derive information about graduates' self-employability. The secondary data include the number of graduates of the selected public university, between 2014- 2018 (deduced from the graduation brochure of the eight selected universities) and number of public university graduates who are self-employed(collected from the Alumni unit of each of the universities and chamber of commerce in the zone). Descriptive statistics of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions raised in the study.

Results

Research Question One: What are the available entrepreneurship training in public universities, North-Central, Nigeria?

Table 1:
Mean and Standard Deviations of the Available Entrepreneurship Training in Public Universities, North-Central, Nigeria

Entrepreneur Training	Mean	SD
Vocational Training	2.33	1.64
Theoretical Training	6.38	2.32
Practical Training	5.42	2.25

As shown from table 1 above, the theoretical training has the highest mean score of 6.38 which indicate that it is the mostly available entrepreneurship training, followed by practical training with mean of 5.42 while vocational training has the lowest mean of 2.33 and is the lease available entrepreneurship training. Thus theoretical training entrepreneurship training, followed by practical training while vocational training is the least available entrepreneurship training in public university, North central Nigeria.

Research Question Two: What are the core-skills acquired by students of public universities, North-Central zone, Nigeria?

Table 2:
Mean and Standard Deviation of the Core-skills Acquisition in Public Universities, North-central, Nigeria

Core-skills Acquisition	Mean	SD
Vocational Skills	4.24	1.64
Communication Skills	2.76	2.12
Managerial Skills	2.42	1.22

Table 2 showed that acquisition of communication skills is with the highest mean of 4.24, followed by vocational skills with the mean of 2.76 while managerial skills acquisition has the lowest with the mean of 2.42. Therefore, communication skills acquired is of a higher extent compared to vocational skills while the least acquired skills is the managerial skills**.**

Research Question Three: What is the level of graduates' self-employability in public university, North-central, Nigeria?

Table 3:
Mean and Standard Deviation of Graduate Self-employability in Public University, North-Central, Nigeria

Graduates' Self employability	Number	Percentage
Number of Graduates between 2014-2018	87,429	100%
Number of Self-employed Graduates	8,541	10.24%
Number of Graduates that are not self-employed	78888	89.76%

Table 3 revealed that the total number of graduates(2014-2018) in public university in North-central, Nigeria is 87,429 while the number of self-employed graduates is 8,541 (10.24%). This implies that about 89.76% of the graduates are not self-employed. Since the percentage of self-employed graduates is far lower than that of those that are not self- employed (civil servants or unemployed graduates), it was adjudged that the level of self-employability of graduates in public university in North-central, Nigeria is very low.

Discussion of Results

The research question one revealed that theoretical training is the most available entrepreneurship training, followed by practical training while vocational training is the lease available entrepreneurship training in public university in North-central Nigeria. It was observed during the field work that many universities engage mostly in classroom teaching of entrepreneurship training. Practical training and vocational training are not usually made available to the students. This was not in connection with the challenge of getting skilled personnel from outside because many of the lecturers assigned to handle the courses are not practically skilled enough to handle the courses. Inadequate funding is another challenge pointed out. This finding tallies with that of Beckley (2018) who affirmed in his study that poor societal attitude to technical and vocational education, inadequate possession of knowledge and skills for entrepreneurship training by the university' lecturers, poor budgetary allocation for education by the government, inadequate facilities and equipment for teaching and poor enterprising culture are some of the challenges facing entrepreneurship training, skills acquisition and employment creation in the country. Agbamu (2017) opined that teaching approach requires a shift from telling or narrating to effective learning through hands-on and active participation in a real life entrepreneurial

environment. Realin (2015) also observed the same trend in entrepreneurship training and thereby advised that the theoretical nature of training in schools without students' exposure to work-based skills hampers learning and should be improved upon for the betterment of Nigeria.

The research question two revealed that communication skills is acquired to a higher extent compared to vocational skills while the least acquired skills is the managerial skills. This is connected to the fact that the mostly available training is theoretical training. The students rather learn communication skills rather than the core-skills like vocational skills and managerial skills. This is a great problem because it is likely going to be difficult for any entrepreneur to be successful without vocational or managerial skills. This is against the findings of Uche and Adesope (2009),which discovered that lecturers imparted in the student only entrepreneurial skills without training such as skills to start a small scale business, independent minded skill, communication/ proposal presentation skill, risk taking skill, time management skill, business management skill, attitude to work and corporate management skill.

Further finding showed that the level of self-employability of graduates in public university, North-central, Nigeria is very low. This conforms to the observation of Parsa, Self, Njite and King (2005), that many enterprises died within their first five years of existence while some go into extinction between the sixth and tenth years, leaving about five to ten percent to survive, thrive and grow to maturity. The finding of study of Ediagbonya and Oyadongha (2017) is not in countenance with the finding of this study as the study revealed that business education graduate employability skills was high.

Conclusion

The study focuses on entrepreneurship training, core-skills acquisition and public university graduates' self-employability in North-central, Nigeria..Based on the findings of the study, the availability of vocational aspect of entrepreneurship training was found to be low, the managerial aspect of core-skills acquisition required was also low and the level of public university graduates' self-employability between years (2014-2018) was also low. However, the government of Nigeria has invested greatly in entrepreneurship training in order to develop core-skills acquisition in students of universities so that they can become self-employed and employers of labour rather than job seekers. This will reduce the incessant increase in youth unemployment menace in the country occasioned by increasing number of graduates with less corresponding skills to enable them become self-reliant. Upon all the investments, it seems that little progress has been made towards enhancing self-employability of graduates, particularly in North-central, Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The university administrators should partner with the community to lessen the burden of recruiting core-skilled entrepreneurial to aid effective vocational and practical training.
2. More funds should be made available to allow procurement of needed resources (both human and materials) to enhance effectiveness of entrepreneurship training in Nigeria universities.
3. More attention should be paid to the development of vocational skills acquisition.
4. Efforts should also be intensified on developing students on the managerial skills acquisition. This can be done by involving more lecturers from business and educational management to train potential graduates on the managerial aspect of self-employability.

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