

The Attitudes of Higher Degree Students to Entrepreneurial Skills Training in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

Currently there is high level of unemployment existing among Nigerian citizens living in Nigeria. Nigerian population has been estimated to be around 186 million inhabitants, among who are 93.3 million youth aged between 15 and 54 years. 80 percent of these youths or 75 million of them are unemployed. These numbers do not include millions of dependent women, the elderly and children. Children below 14 years old number 79 million. The impact of unemployment in the land is therefore grave. To worsen the unemployment situation, the Nigerian Universities graduated 250,000 youths this year who joined the job market, without any appreciable skills. However, most Nigerian universities and colleges, and some non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have reacted to the situation by introducing various entrepreneurial skills training programmes along with their academic courses. The skills training programmes prepare the trainees for various types of jobs or self employment on graduation. This study evaluated the attitudes of postgraduate early childhood education (ECE) students to entrepreneurial skills training sessions in early childhood education sector. The study is a descriptive one, employing a purposive sampling technique. The sample consisted of 38 early childhood education majors who have spent one semester on the course, and have participated in both the course work and entrepreneurial skills training for ECE majors. The instrument was a researcher constructed Entrepreneurial Skills Attitude Scale (ESAS), with a validity of .78. The analysis of ESAS reveal that 95 percent of the sample enjoy the entrepreneurial skills training; 87 percent hope to establish their own ECE ventures on graduation; 84 percent preferred to be self employed on graduation and 53 percent chose to engage in production of children's literature. Gender and age were not significant factors in the attitudes of trainees. It was recommended that the entrepreneurial training program be strengthened.

Keywords: Attitudes; Entrepreneurial skills; early childhood; Education

Introduction

The level of unemployment among Nigerian youths has become alarming in recent times. Unemployment among the youths has engulfed even millions of university graduates who have not found any use of their various certificates and diplomas. Job seekers can be seen in large numbers milling around major streets in towns and around the few functioning industrial business lay-outs that seem to possess potential to engage workers. University graduates with higher degrees hide their certificates and other qualifications in order to take up menial jobs such as messengers, cleaners, clerical officers and even gate-men. The situation is so bad that when the Federal Civil Service Commission opened its portals for job recruitment in September, 2016, it was claimed that five million applications were received in a space of two days for less than one thousand vacancies. The portal therefore closed abruptly and has not been reopened.

Index Mundi (2016) and National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2016) have estimated Nigerian population to be 186 million inhabitants, among who 93.3 million are youths within the age range of 15 to 54 years of age. 80 percent of these youth or 75 million youths are unemployed (Index Mundi, 2016). Index Mundi further computed the total dependency ratio in the population as 87.7 percent. This figure translates to 163 million Nigerians as dependants of a paltry 23 million providers. The situation therefore reflects an urgent need to provide job opportunities for millions of jobless Nigerian youths who are eager and willing to earn their living by doing legitimate work. When more people in the population get jobs, the dependency ratio will certainly decrease.

Despite the large number of unemployed youths in the population, the Nigerian Universities and Colleges produce over 200,000 fresh graduates annually who join the job market with or without essential skills. Fawole and Olaogun (2012) observed that since 2012, the Nigerian Universities produced over 250,000 fresh graduates yearly. Now the number of universities has risen from 120 in 2012 to 152 in 2016 (NUC, 2016); it is estimated that the production rate per annum of job seeking fresh graduates might rise up to 300,000 by 2019 when all the additional new Nigerian universities will be producing graduates. The Federal and State Governments that control the nation's wealth and economy are watching helplessly without any effective policy or strategy that might work to reverse the already bad state of affairs.

The need to provide jobs in Nigeria for jobless Nigerian youths, especially university graduates from both home and abroad has become urgent. Deliberate efforts and planning directed to real job creation are now required from both the private and public sectors of the economy. There is no hope for now, that the current Nigerian governments (States and Federal), have the capacity to create jobs for significant number of the jobless Nigerians, which will substantially impact on the level of unemployment in the country. The current state of economic recession affords the governments a lame excuse. They however fail to realize that the foremost objective of a peoples' government is to promote the welfare of the greatest number of its citizens.

Several researchers have suggested that there is a possibility of adopting entrepreneurial skills education as a way out of the present situation (Adeyemo, 2009; and Fawowe and Olaogun 2012), while BIS (2015) added the condition that if funding could be provided to the entrepreneurs, then the level of success might be higher. Most Nigerian universities have introduced entrepreneurial skills education as part of their elective courses in some departments; some have integrated aspects/elements on entrepreneur education into already existing courses. This development in the education sector is considered a positive approach to curtailing unemployment among Nigerian university graduates. However, funding young entrepreneurs is a task far beyond the capacity of most Nigerian Universities. Rae, (2004) as well as Galloway, Anderson, Brown & Wilson (2005) was of the view that entrepreneurial skills could be taught in higher education.

Although several Nigerian universities have embraced entrepreneurial skills education, there is a problem regarding the meaning and standard definition of entrepreneurial skills. BIS Research Paper No. 236 (2015) observed that extensive literature exists for management and leadership skills, but that little is known about entrepreneurship skills. The authors further confirmed that a set of skills exist that can be called entrepreneurship skills; they however asserted that such skills are only associated with business success. BIS- 15-456 (2015) summarized the definition of Entrepreneurial skills thus: "Entrepreneurial skills are associated with competence in the process of opportunity identification, and/or creation, the ability to capitalize on identified opportunities and a range of skills associated with developing and implementing business plans to enable such opportunities be realized...."

The authors of BIS 236 (2015) stated that they could not find any substantial linkage between specific education, training, or support programmes that promote entrepreneurship. The authors specifically opined that: "there is strong evidence that entrepreneurs tend to learn less effectively from conventional didactic approaches typical of much of educational sector and some indication that a task-oriented approach focused on real business problems would bear fruit with this group" Paper No. 236, p20. However, Chell (2013) and Hayton (2015) agree with Parsley and Weerasinghe (2010) that some entrepreneurial skills could be taught, learned and improved by training contrary to the belief that these skills cannot be taught. BIS Research paper No. 456 was emphatic in stressing that "there is evidence that some entrepreneurship skills can be taught and/or learned" p 5. Some other researchers have also affirmed the efficacy of entrepreneur skills instruction (Rae, 2004; Henry, Hill and Leitch, 2005; Ikuenomore and Olaniran, 2012; Oyinlofor, 2013 and Rodriguez-Pose and Hardy, 2015).

There is therefore some merit in the attempt by several Nigerian Universities to teach students who are registered for academic degrees, some courses designed to impart entrepreneurial skills. There is hope that some of the students that benefit from entrepreneurial skills education from academic institutions will eventually become successful entrepreneurs. It is important to note that BIS Research Paper No. 236 (2015) is an international literature review on entrepreneurial skills by experts. The review covered the United States of America, Britain, Canada and Australia. The review found that entrepreneurial skills are gender, location and ethnicity sensitive. This reason may account for the general observation of disparities in number of successful entrepreneurs between gender, location and ethnicity divides. The review of literature did not cover business enterprises in Asia, South America, Africa and other developing world countries. It is therefore probable that there may be other principles or factors that affect entrepreneur skills teaching; learning and improvement which may not be present in the developed economies but may be present in developing economies. It is therefore important to expand the research problem beyond the current considerations of Europe, America and Australia. There is therefore a need to investigate various factors that may be suspected to influence entrepreneur skills development and learning in developing economies such as Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

The problem of this study was to explore the effect of entrepreneurial skills development activities in early childhood education on participants' attitudes to entrepreneurship and the over-all attitude of participants to entrepreneurial skills education.

Research questions

1. What proportion of trainees has aspirations to engage in business enterprise on completion of training?
2. What proportion of trainees view entrepreneur skills education as important for their future?
3. Does age grouping of trainees affect their attitudes to entrepreneur skills education?
4. Does gender of trainees have significant effect on their entrepreneur skills attitude score?

Methodology

This study is a descriptive research involving explorative activities in teaching entrepreneur skills in early childhood education to a purposive sample of 38 higher degree students in early childhood education. The sample was made up of 18 males and 20 female students who were registered for academic degrees in early childhood education. The duration of training for this study was twelve weeks in which the students took part in preparing early childhood teaching materials including video presentation for numeracy and literacy, clothing, toys; counting material such as abacus, beads, wooden and plastic blocks, balls, shapes; paper shapes, colours, designs, magnetic boards, felt boards etc. Apart from these, marketing, installation and use of innovative material for early childhood care and education were studied. At the end of the course the participants prepared projects.

The instrument used for data collection was a researcher constructed entrepreneur skills attitude scale (ESAS) consisting of fifteen items with a reliability of .78, when administered on a different sample of higher degree early childhood education students. The students were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire. Simple frequency counts, percentages and the analysis of variance technique were used to evaluate the data obtained from the questionnaire.

Results

Analysis of the bio-data of the participants reveals that there were 18 males and 20 females among who were 15 young persons aged between 19 and 29 years; and mature men and women whose ages were not less than 30 years.

Research question 1: What proportion of trainees has aspirations to engage in business enterprise on completion of training?

Table 1: self employed on graduation * gender of participant * age of participant Cross tabulation

Count age of participant		gender of participant		Total	%	
		male	female			
Young	I will like to be self employed on graduation	Sure	1	1	2	5.3
		very Sure	4	9	13	34.2
	Total	5	10	15	39.5	
Mature	I will like to be self employed on graduation	not Sure	1	0	1	2.6
		Sure	1	2	3	7.9
		very Sure	11	8	19	50.0
	Total	13	10	23	60.5	
Total	I will like to be self employed on graduation	not Sure	1	0	1	2.6
		Sure	2	3	5	13.2
		very Sure	15	17	32	84.2
	Total	18	20	38	100.0	

Table 1 exemplifies the attitudes of participants to self employment on graduation, according to gender and maturity. One young male and one young female participant or 5 percent of sample, were just sure of being self employed on graduation; while four young males and nine young females or 34 percent of the sample expressed higher confidence (very sure), at being self employed on graduation. For mature men and women, one man or 2.6 percent of sample, expressed no belief (not sure), of self employment; two men and three women or 13 percent of sample, had minimum hope (just sure) of self employment on graduation. 11 men and eight women or 50 percent of sample, expressed very high hopes of being self employed on graduation. On the whole, 97 percent of the sample was sure or very sure of engaging in self employment on graduation, while only 3 percent had no hope at all in self employment on graduation. This result signifies a highly favourable disposition to self employment.

Research question 2: What proportion of trainees view entrepreneur skills education as important for university graduates?

Table 2: proportion of respondents that view entrepreneur skills education as important for university graduates

age of participant		Total	%	
Young	Entrepreneurial education is good for all university graduates	very little	2	5.2
		very much	13	34.2
	Total	15	39.5	
Mature	Entrepreneurial education is good for all university graduates	not at all	1	2.6
		very little	4	10.5
		very much	18	47.4
	Total	23	60.5	
Total	Entrepreneurial education is good for all university graduates	not at all	1	2.6
		very little	6	15.8
		very much	31	61.6
	Total	38	100.0	

The data in Table 2 shows that two young persons or 5.2 percent of sample believed that the training was of very little good for university graduates, whereas 13 young respondents or 34 per cent of sample believed that the training had much use. For mature students, only one respondent believed that the training was not useful at- all; four mature respondents believed that it had little use, while 18 mature respondents believed that the training was very useful.

In summary, only less than 3 percent of sample found no use for the training; 16 percent found the training to have limited use, while 62 percent of sample believed that the training had much use. The training was therefore considered useful for university graduate.

Research question 3: Does age grouping of trainees affect the attitude of the respondents to entrepreneur skills education?

Table 3: Analysis of the effect of age grouping on attitudes of trainees to entrepreneur skills education
Dependent Variable: total entrepreneurial attitude score

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intercept	Hypothesis	44253.937	1	44253.937	4531.620	.009
	Error	9.766	1	9.766 ^a		
Grpage	Hypothesis	29.907	1	29.907	4.808	.272
	Error	6.220	1	6.220 ^b		
Gender	Hypothesis	9.766	1	9.766	1.570	.429
	Error	6.220	1	6.220 ^b		
grpage * Gender	Hypothesis	6.220	1	6.220	.424	.519
	Error	498.283	34	14.655 ^c		

a. MS(Gender)

b. MS(grpage * Gender)

c. MS(Error)

The data in Table 3 reveals that age grouping of trainees for the study was not significant: [$F_{(1, 34)} = 4.808, P > .05$]. The result of data analysis as shown in Table 3 reveals that the age grouping of respondents was not a significant factor in this study. We therefore conclude that the age grouping of trainees does not affect the entrepreneur skills attitudes of trainees.

Research question 4: Does gender of trainees have significant effect on entrepreneur skills attitude score?

The answer to this research question is contained in Table 3. The effect of gender on entrepreneur skills attitudes scores of trainees for this study is: { $F_{(1, 34)} = 1.570; p > .05$ }, which is not significant. Also the first order interaction of age and gender was not significant in this study. It was therefore concluded that the gender of trainees does not affect the entrepreneurial attitudes of trainees in this study.

Discussion of results

For research question 1; the data in Table 1 shows that females were just marginally surer of becoming entrepreneurs on graduation. This result is contrary to expectations because it is generally believed that, and often documented in literature that more men than women are entrepreneurs (BIS paper No.236, 2015). The finding that more women than men exhibited the will power to become entrepreneurs is something to be encouraged among university students at this period of severe unemployment in Nigeria. On the importance of entrepreneurial skills education to university graduates, this study reveals that only about three percent of the sample believed that it is not important. 16 percent feel that it has little importance; while about 63 percent of sample believed that entrepreneurial skill education is very important for university graduates. This finding is particularly heart-warming because being aware of the importance of entrepreneurial skills training to university graduates is considered a significant step towards solving the problem of unemployment among university graduates in Nigeria. This view is supported by the submission of Birch (1986), that the recognition of a problem is an important step towards its solution.

On age grouping of trainees, the analyses contained in Table 3 shows that the age grouping of participants was not a significant factor affecting the entrepreneurial attitude of trainees. Although older trainees tended to exhibit higher mean entrepreneur skills attitudes, the mean difference in attitudes between young adults and mature adults was not statistically different. It was therefore concluded that the ages of trainees does not affect their entrepreneurial attitudes. Therefore postgraduate students of various ages may train together on entrepreneurial skills development, without any widely different attitudinal outcomes. The data in Table 4 has shown that gender of trainees was not a significant factor in this study.

This is contrary to the observations of research report contained in BIS Research Report No. 236 (2015) that stated that entrepreneur skills is gender, location and ethnicity sensitive for studies that were conducted in the advanced economies of Europe, United States of America, Canada and Australia. There is therefore the need for more studies of entrepreneur skills development in both the advanced and developing economies.

Conclusion

This study has shown that it is likely that most Nigerian university graduates would cherish entrepreneur skills education. Their exposure to the training will expose them to some of the demands of becoming entrepreneurs, which is considered a significant step in resolving the problem of graduate unemployment in Nigeria. There is every likelihood that if funding is provided, most Nigerian higher degree graduates who have entrepreneur skills education will happily engage in rewarding business enterprises.

Recommendation

Creating rewarding employment for all Nigerians, especially the young population is considered a vital step towards curbing insurgency and other social ills that unemployment produces. The Nigerian governments, both States and Federal, as well as the universities should pursue vigorously entrepreneur skills education for all higher education students. The training will expose a larger number of Nigerian university graduates to entrepreneur skills education and hopefully equip more of them to become successful entrepreneurs. The move will hopefully reduce to a manageable size, the population of unemployed graduates in the larger Nigerian society.

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