

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SKILL ACQUISITION: INDISPENSABLE TOOLS FOR COMBATING YOUTHS' UNEMPLOYMENT AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA.

Bassey, Njorkun Ndubuisi¹
bassey.ndubuisi@unn.edu.ng

Akah, Maryrita Nnenna²
ritagemma6@gmail.com

¹Department of Agricultural Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

²Department of Vocational and Entrepreneurship Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Corresponding Author: Bassey, N.N. (bassey.ndubuisi@unn.edu.ng)

Abstract

The study examined “entrepreneurship and skill acquisition: indispensable tools for combating youths’ unemployment and poverty reduction in Enugu state, Nigeria”. Three specific purposes and three research questions guided the study. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, and it was conducted in Enugu State. A total population of 120 participants who were successful in their businesses and skill areas were randomly selected and studied. A structured questionnaire was used for the study. Data collection was carried out by the researcher and three research assistants. Mean and Standard Deviation were used to analyse the data. The findings revealed fourteen (14) vital transferable skills needed for youth’s entrepreneurship; thirty-one (31) lucrative vocational skill areas youths can acquire; and twelve (12) ways entrepreneurship and skill acquisition can help in reducing youths’ unemployment and poverty. It was concluded that for one to become a successful entrepreneur, he/she must acquire and master the generic/transferable skills in addition to one or more vocational skills. Based on the findings, it was recommended that: there should be introduction of generic/transferable skills to Nigeria educational system; introduction of more entrepreneurship and skill courses into Nigeria education system; re-orienting the Nigeria youths towards embracing entrepreneurship and skill acquisition among others.

Keywords: Youths, Entrepreneurship, Skill Acquisition, Unemployment, Poverty.

Introduction

Youths' unemployment has remained one of the greatest factors militating against the growth and development of Nigeria economy. According to National Bureau of Statistics (2022), the unemployment and underemployment situation in Nigeria has risen to 33.3% and 22.8% respectively. Greater percentage of this employment rate in Nigeria is found among the youths. Njoku and Ihugba (2011) stated that youth's unemployment has maintained a rising trend over the years. Currently, the youth's unemployment in Nigeria has risen to 42.5% as reported by National Bureau of Statistics. This is due to the fact that majority of Nigeria youths over-depend on government jobs instead of acquiring useful entrepreneurial skills needed for job creation. Most of these youths especially the graduates lack entrepreneurial and business-driven mindset which are highly needed for one to become an entrepreneur or a business person, thereby giving rise to high unemployment rate in Nigeria. The resultant effect of this joblessness or unemployment among the Nigeria youths is nothing other than increase in poverty and high rate of crimes.

Unemployment generally, refers to a situation when a person who is actively searching for employment is unable to find work (Chappelow, 2020). The unemployment rate simply means the percentage of people who fall within the labour force who are unemployed (Bassey, 2021). Even those that managed to get jobs, many of them are under paid, thereby resulting to increased underemployment rate in Nigeria. Increase in youths' unemployment and underemployment rate in Nigeria has constituted a big threat to the social, economic and political stability of the country (Mpofu, 2020).

Youths' unemployment in Nigeria is one of the major causes of the social vices (stealing, robbery, killing, bombing, assassination, rapping among others) happening in this country (Akah, 2020). The consequences of youths' unemployment situation in Nigeria as noted by Agomuo (2017) is that some

unemployed youths are mobilized by warlords, criminal gangs, illegal migration syndicates for committing criminal activities such as robbery, terrorism, kidnapping, assassination and internet fraud. Agomuo also noted that the younger ones among them are usually discouraged from taking formal education studies seriously because their seniors who have been to school are jobless and frustrated. According to Bassey (2021), the increase in unemployment rate in Nigeria has also resulted to high poverty rate, low standard of living, hunger, depression, suffering among others in the lives of the citizens. To reduce overdependence on government jobs and to decrease unemployment rate in Nigeria, there is need to embrace entrepreneurship to its fullness.

Entrepreneurship “refers to person’s ability to change ideas into action thereby helping people to be more creative and self-confident in whatever they undertake” (Barzdins, 2012). It can also be seen as a dynamic and social process where individuals (single or group) identify opportunities and act towards reshaping the ideas to practical activities in social, cultural, or economical contexts (Berglund and Holmgren, 2013). Entrepreneurship is the willingness and ability of an individual to seek out investment opportunities in an environment and be able to establish and run an enterprise successfully based on identified opportunities (Gana in Egbule (2018). Entrepreneurship focuses on identifying new opportunities for creating value for customers or users and commercially developing those opportunities to establish a profitable business (Dada, 2019).

Entrepreneurship plays key roles to developing economies which include- it stimulates economic growth, creates jobs, enhances foreign exchange and facilitates rural developments among others (Akhter and Sumi, 2014). Entrepreneurship is the heart of the modern business, a force behind innovative businesses that characterize the modern economy (Mokaya, Namusonge and Sikalieh, 2012). It is a major contributing factor to the economic growth and development of any nation in the world (Akah, 2021). The author further posited that, it is unarguably fact that any

nation that wants speedy growth and development must embrace entrepreneurship to its fullness. In developed countries, entrepreneurship is considered as an engine or catalyst for growth potentials because it raises standard of living of people by creating small and medium sized enterprises that contribute positively to the welfare of the society (Cahna in Akah, 2021). However, the vital roles of entrepreneurship have not really been felt in Nigeria just like in the case of developed countries of the world. Onwuka, Ugwu and Kalu, (2014) maintained that in Nigeria context, entrepreneurship development has not translated significantly to economic growth.

The ultimate goal for entrepreneurship is to create wealth, and if wealth is not created, it is something else than entrepreneurship (Brännback and Carsrud, 2016). This implicitly means that wealth creation is the same as the success of an entrepreneur. An entrepreneur is referred to as a person who always seek change, responds to change, and exploits it as an opportunity (Akhter and Sumi, 2014). Entrepreneurs according to Ezedum, Agbo and Odigbo (2011) are seekers, they are also referred to as opportunity recognition, discovery and identification. The authors also noted that opportunities can be recognized, discovered or created. Entrepreneurs always seek and exploit every given opportunity that comes their way. Schumpeter in Ikeije and Onuba (2015) defined an entrepreneur as a risk-taking innovator needed for rapid economic development, through the process of “creative destruction” by which obsolete technologies and ideas are replaced by new ones. It is agreed that entrepreneurs are created by a combination of three factors: opportunities, resources and skilled people (Ahmad and Hoffman, 2012). This implies that skill acquisition is very vital for one to become a successful entrepreneur or a business person.

Skill is the ability to perform a task to a predefined level of competence (Pitan, and Adedeji, 2012). It can also be seen as a talent or ability an individual possesses which can be obtained through training, personal experiences, observation and practice (Iroegbu, 2017). Skills can be categorized into two: transferable or generic skills and

vocational or technical skill. *Transferable or generic skills* also known as soft skills are those skills that can be applied in different occupations (Ikechi, Eke, Ukwubuiwe and Ukomadu, 2019). These generic skills are highly needed in different occupations. Some of the generic skills include analytical skill, critical thinking, communication, entrepreneurial, decision making, innovation, coping skills, collaboration, communication, accountability and behaviours that promote relationships and successful living (Melser, 2019). *Vocational skills* are the abilities and competences which are specific to a particular occupation or are required to work within an occupation (Ikechi, Eke, Ukwubuiwe and Ukomadu, 2019). Some of the vocational skills include tailoring, hair making, hair cutting, bakery, shoe making, fish farming, poultry rearing and livestock feeds production among others. The two types of skills (generic and vocational skills) are very important in the world of work in this 21st century. This implies that Nigeria youths need to acquire the generic skills as well as one or more vocational skills to enable them become self-employed and successful entrepreneurs in the society. This can be achieved by undergoing skill training programme.

Skill training is a learning programme given to an individual or group of individuals which leads to acquisition of practical knowledge for self-sustenance (Idoko, 2014). It can also be seen as a learning process that helps an individual or group to build their ability to seamlessly and effortlessly do that which they are trained to do (Ikechi et al., 2019). Skill training involves the development of a new skill, habit or a way of doing things usually gained through exposure or experience (Iroegbu, 2017). Skill acquisition has been seen by many scholars as a tool for eradicating poverty and hunger through creation of jobs (Iroegbu, 2017).

However, many of the Nigeria youths especially the graduates do not possess these vital skills (generic and vocational) which are highly needed for job creation or employment. This is due to imbalance or mismatch between what is learnt in the school system and what is obtainable in the world of work. Due to lack of skills, most of them are unemployed while many of them that are employed are under paid resulting to high unemployment and underemployment rate in Nigeria. The major consequence of

unemployment and underemployment is poverty and increased in crimes. Little wonder why Nigeria has a large number of poor people and high crime rate in the world. There is need for Nigeria youths to acquire entrepreneurial and vocational skills in order to enable them to become self-employed and take them away from poverty as well as bettering Nigeria economy. This necessitated the need for this study. Specifically, this study sought to:

1. determine the vital generic or transferable skills needed for youth's entrepreneurship in Enugu State,
2. fine out lucrative vocational skill areas youths can acquire for a living in Enugu State; and
3. examined ways entrepreneurship and skill acquisition can help in reducing youths' unemployment and poverty in Enugu State.

Research Questions

1. What are the vital generic or transferable skills needed for youth's entrepreneurship in Enugu State?
2. What are the lucrative vocational skill areas youths can acquire for a living in Enugu State?
3. What are the ways entrepreneurship and skill acquisition can help in reducing youths' unemployment and poverty in Enugu State?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design and it was carried out in Enugu State, Nigeria. Six (6) Local Government Areas (that is two L.G.A's in each of the three Senatorial District in Enugu State were randomly selected through a simple random technique and used for the study. The senatorial districts and the selected L.G.A's include- Enugu West District: Orji River and Udi L.G.As.; Enugu East District: Enugu North and Nkanu West L.G.As.; and Enugu North District: Nsukka and Igbo-Etiti L.G.A's. A total population of one hundred and twenty (120) participants who were experienced in businesses and skill areas were randomly

selected from the six (6) Local Government Areas selected in Enugu State (that is, twenty (20) participants in each Local Government) were studied. To avoid gender bias, ten (10) successful businessmen and ten (10) successful businesswomen were sampled in each of the Local Government Area. The businesses and skill areas sampled include tailors, welders, mechanics, fish farmers, poultry farmers, crop farmers, bakers, provision store operators, cosmetic shop owners, boutique, among others.

A structured questionnaire containing 61 items with response scales of Strongly Agree (S.A), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (S.D) with nominal values of 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively was used for the study. The instrument was face validated by three entrepreneurship lecturers, two from Faculty of Vocational and Technical Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) and one from Department of Technical and Vocational Education, Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT). The instrument was administered to the respondents in their various business areas by the researcher with the aid of three research assistants, one for each of the Senatorial District. A total of one hundred and twenty (120) copies of the questionnaires were distributed; and only one hundred and twelve (112) were retrieved from the respondents and analysed. The data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation. The decision was that any mean response which is 2.50 and above was considered 'Agreed' while any item with a mean score below 2.50 was 'Disagreed' by the respondents. All the analyses were done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software.

Results

Research Question 1:

What are the vital generic or transferable skills needed for youth's entrepreneurship in Enugu State?

Table 1: Mean responses of the vital generic or transferable skills needed for youth's entrepreneurship in Enugu State

S/N	Item Statement	Mean	S.D	Remark
1.	Developing critical thinking skill	3.55	0.72	Agreed
2.	Acquiring good communication skill	3.40	0.61	Agreed
3.	Good decision-making skill	3.30	0.56	Agreed
4.	Developing creative skill	3.69	0.49	Agreed
5.	Entrepreneurial skill	3.80	0.94	Agreed
6.	Having good leadership skill	3.50	0.71	Agreed
7.	Innovative skill	3.45	0.59	Agreed
8.	Collaboration and team work skills	3.00	0.71	Agreed
9.	Accountability skill	3.05	0.62	Agreed
10.	Good human relationship skill	3.50	0.75	Agreed
11.	Initiative and problem-solving skills	3.44	0.60	Agreed
12.	Digital and ICT skills	3.75	0.62	Agreed
13.	Coping skill	3.30	0.43	Agreed

Key: Total number of respondents (N) = 112; Standard Deviation (SD)

Table 1 presented the mean responses of the vital generic or transferable skills needed for youth's entrepreneurship in Enugu State. All the items 1-13 had mean responses of 3.00 to 3.80 which were far above the cut of point of 2.50. This implied that all the 13 items are the vital generic or transferable skills needed for youth's entrepreneurship. Also, all the items had a standard deviation which ranged from 0.43 to 0.94 indicating that the respondents were not too far from the mean and were close to one another in their responses.

Research Question 2:

What are the lucrative vocational skill areas youths can acquire in Enugu State?

Table 2: Mean responses of the lucrative vocational skill areas youths can acquire for a living in Enugu State

S/N	Question Item Statement	Mean	S.D	Remark
a.	Building and construction			
14.	Plumbing	3.20	0.65	Agreed
15.	Bricklaying and block moulding	2.55	0.56	Agreed

16.	Welding and fabrication	3.00	0.59	Agreed
17.	Tiling	3.20	0.73	Agreed
18.	Carpentry	2.80	0.83	Agreed
19.	Furniture making	3.05	0.57	Agreed
b.	Mechanical, Electrical and Electronics			
20.	Motorcycle mechanics	3.10	0.76	Agreed
21.	Motor (cars) mechanics	2.80	0.65	Agreed
22.	Automobile electrician	3.00	0.87	Agreed
23.	Electrical wiring	3.10	0.91	Agreed
24.	Television and radio repairs	2.89	0.73	Agreed
c.	Home Economics Areas			
25.	Tailoring/fashion and design	3.35	0.62	Agreed
26.	Hair making	3.30	0.45	Agreed
27.	Barbing salon	2.55	0.66	Agreed
28.	Soap Production	2.44	0.71	Disagreed
29.	Bakery	3.20	0.64	Agreed
30.	Decoration	3.10	0.77	Agreed
31.	Events planning and management	3.23	0.46	Agreed
32.	Manicure and pedicure	3.00	0.77	Agreed
33.	Fast food management	2.89	0.86	Agreed
34.	Eateries and hotel management	2.62	0.55	Agreed
35.	Shoes and bags making	2.55	0.56	Agreed
d.	Agriculture/farming			
36.	Fish farming and breeding	2.48	0.59	Disagreed
37.	Poultry production (broiler or table egg production)	3.00	0.66	Agreed
38.	Honey bee production	3.00	0.86	Agreed
39.	Snail farming	2.25	0.76	Disagreed
40.	Pig farming	2.90	0.49	Agreed
41.	Processing of agricultural products e.g. palm oil processing	2.44	0.91	Disagreed
42.	Rabbit rearing	2.40	0.84	Disagreed
43.	Storage of agricultural products e.g Bambara nut, beans, palm oil, honey, maize etc.	3.10	0.46	Agreed
44.	Vegetable crops production	2.90	0.49	Agreed
45.	Landscaping	3.00	0.79	Agreed
e.	ICT, Photography and Video Production			
45.	ICT and business centre	3.50	0.66	Agreed
46.	Computer programming	3.10	0.76	Agreed
47.	Photography and video coverage	2.88	0.89	Agreed
48.	Photo and video editing	2.60	0.90	Agreed
49.	Graphic designs and production	3.00	0.81	Agreed

Key: Total number of respondents (N) = 112; Standard Deviation (SD)

The data presented in Table 2 on the lucrative vocational skill areas youths can acquire in Enugu State revealed that 31 out of the 36 items obtained mean responses ranging from 2.55 to 3.55, which were above the cut of mark and this showed that the items were accepted by the respondents as lucrative vocational skill areas youths can acquire in Enugu State. However, 5 of the items (28,36, 39, 41 and 42) had a mean response below 2.50 which implied that the respondents disagreed that these five items are not lucrative vocational skill areas youths can acquire in Enugu State. The standard deviation of the items ranged from 0.45 to 0.91 which indicated that the respondents are unanimous in their responses as they are not far from the mean.

Research Question 3:

What are the ways entrepreneurship and skill acquisition can help in reducing youths' unemployment and poverty in Enugu State?

Table 3: Mean ratings of the ways entrepreneurship and skill acquisition can help in reducing youths' unemployment and poverty in Enugu State.

S/N	Question Item	Mean	S.D	Remark
50.	Entrepreneurship and skill acquisition enable the youths to be business oriented	3.50	0.66	Agreed
51.	They enable the youths to be self-employed after school	3.80	0.56	Agreed
52.	Skills generate income	3.65	0.49	Agreed
53.	Enable the youths to meet up with their daily financial needs	3.55	0.83	Agreed
54.	Help to develop youths creative and innovative skills	3.00	0.82	Agreed
55.	They increase standard of living among the youths	3.10	0.56	Agreed
56.	Make the youths to be responsible citizen in the society	3.35	0.55	Agreed
57.	Increase nation's gross domestic products	2.95	0.65	Agreed

58.	Keep the youths busy and proper utilization of time	3.01	1.00	Agreed
59.	Make the youths to be more productive	3.20	0.63	Agreed
60.	Prevents frustrations and disappointments which results from unemployment	3.27	0.63	Agreed
61.	Decrease in social vices and criminal activities among the youths in the country	3.80	0.44	Agreed

Key: Total number of respondents (N) = 112; Standard Deviation (SD)

Table 3 showed that all the 12 items on the ways entrepreneurship and skill acquisition can help in reducing youths' unemployment and poverty in Enugu State got mean responses from 2.95 to 3.80, therefore indicating that all the respondents agreed that all the items are ways entrepreneurship and skill acquisition can help in reducing youths' unemployment and poverty. The standard deviation ranges from 0.44 to 1.00 which shows that the respondents were not far from the mean.

Discussion of the Findings

The result presented in table 1 revealed the vital generic or transferable skills needed for youth's entrepreneurship in Enugu State to include: developing critical thinking skill, good communication skill, good decision-making skill, creative skill, entrepreneurial skill, good leadership skill, innovative skill, collaboration and team work skills, accountability skill, good human relationship skill, initiative and problem-solving skills, digital and ICT skills and coping skill. The findings are in line with the finding of Funmilayo and Olelewe (2019) who buttressed that youths need to be taught the skill of creative thinking to enable them to fit in the society. In addition, the authors pointed out that the youths also need digital literacy to enable them function well in the society in

this 21st century. Reynolds, Tavares and Notari (2017), highlighted three key areas of digital literacies which Nigeria youths need to include: information literacy (IL), information and communication technology (ICT) skills, and media literacy (ML). The authors further buttressed that youths possessing adequate soft skills (generic skills) will enable them adapt to more challenging working environments, manage heavy workload, meet stringent deadlines, as well as interact and work with their counterparts in achieving a mutually agreed goal. Collaboration and team work plays significant roles in whatever we do in life. Pollard (2013) stated that youths need to develop the spirit of tolerance to enable them collaborate and network with one another. Ekanem (2019) buttressed that they (youths) need to collaborate with one another in their endeavours so that they can function effectively in their chosen career. Collaboration and teamwork can only be effective when we understand human behaviours and respect people's opinions, interests, cultures and religions. According to Önderoğlu, Turhan and Oguz (2015), understanding human behaviours, values and attitudes of people in a different society and tolerating individual differences will go a long way in ensuring healthy relationship especially when working as a team. Also, good communication skill is highly needed for smooth running of any organization and good human relationship. Akah (2020) noted that youths in this 21st century need to be guided on how to articulate their thoughts and ideas effectively using oral, written, and non-verbal communication skills in a variety of forms and contexts.

The findings in table 2 identified the lucrative vocational skill areas youths in Enugu State can acquire for a living to include *Building and Construction Skilled Areas* –

plumbing, bricklaying and block moulding, welding and fabrication, tiling, carpentry, furniture making; *Mechanical, Electrical and Electronics Skilled Area*- motor-cycle mechanics, motor (cars) mechanics, automobile electrician, electrical wiring, television and radio repairs, *Home Economics Skill Areas* -tailoring/fashion and design, hair making, barbing, bakery, decoration, events planning and management, manicure and pedicure, fast food management, eateries and hotel management, shoes and bags making; *Agricultural Skill Areas*- poultry production (broiler or table egg production), honey bee production, pig farming, storage of agricultural products e.g. bambara nut, beans, palm oil, honey, maize etc., vegetable crops production and landscaping; *ICT, Photography and Video Production*- ICT and business centre, computer programming, photography and video coverage, photo and video editing, and graphic designs and production. The aforementioned skill areas are lucrative nowadays and it is expected that youths (both graduates, undergraduates and those that are not in school) in Enugu State and other parts of the country should at least acquire one. The results are in conformity with the findings of Bassey (2021) who stated that Nigeria youths need to acquire practical or vocational skills in different agricultural enterprises such as crop production, animal rearing and the processing of the farm produces among others to enable them to be self-employed after graduation from school. Vocational skills are very important in the world of work in this 21st century, and every Nigeria youth should at least acquire one of the vocational skills (Bassey, 2021). Many of the tertiary institutions graduates in Nigeria remain unemployed even up to five years and above in some cases, mainly because they lack relevant skills needed by employers of labour, (Ikechi et al., 2019). Youths especially those in tertiary institution need to be equipped with practical skills in their different field of study, thereby striking a balance between theories and practical.

The result in table 3 revealed ways entrepreneurship and skill acquisition can help in reducing youths unemployment and poverty to include: enable the youths to be business oriented, enable the youths to be self-employed after school, generate income for the youths, enable the youths to meet up with their daily financial needs, help to

develop youths creative and innovative skills, increase standard of living among the youths, make the youths to be responsible citizen in the society, increase nation's gross domestic products, keep the youths busy and proper utilization of time, make the youths to be more productive, prevents frustrations and disappointments which results from unemployment, decrease in social vices and criminal activities among the youths in the country. The findings are in conformity with Nduati (2016), who stressed that development of entrepreneurial skills results in the creation of small businesses which require people that will work there, hence the entrepreneur create job for himself and other people who will be hired to work for him. Small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) help a lot in nation's growth. According to Njoku and Ihugba (2013), countries like Columbia, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia, SMEs employ more than 50% of the workforce. SMEs play crucial roles in the economic development of countries especially in the area of job creation (Ogundele, 2006). This implies that entrepreneurship and skill acquisition lead to creation of small and medium size enterprises which results in job creation and eradication of poverty among the youths.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that entrepreneurship is the key driver of economic growth and development through business creation, job creation, and wealth creation. Both entrepreneurship and skill acquisition are very vital tools needed for job creation and poverty eradication among the youths. The study has identified the generic/transferable skills (soft skills) which every youth need to possess in order to function well in their careers or businesses. The study went further to reveal some lucrative vocational skill (hard skill) areas which every youth need to acquire and master at least one of the skills. The skills cut across different areas or disciplines. The benefits of acquiring the soft and hard skills cannot be overemphasized. In conclusion, to become a successful entrepreneur, one must acquire and master the generic/transferable skills in addition to one or more vocational skills. This will help to reduce youths' unemployment and poverty not only in Enugu State, but in the country as a whole.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, the following recommendations are therefore made:

1. Introduction of generic/transferable skills to Nigeria educational system. Curriculum planners and developers at secondary school and tertiary institutions (college of education, monotechnics, polytechnics and universities) levels should ensure the inclusion of these generic skills into the curriculum both at secondary and tertiary education systems.
2. Introduction of more entrepreneurship and skill courses into Nigeria education system to enable the students to acquire at least one vocational skill area before graduating from school (be it at primary, secondary or tertiary institution levels).
3. Re-orienting the Nigeria youths to have a change of mindset towards depending on government jobs and to embrace entrepreneurial skills.
4. Nigeria government at all levels (Local, State and Federal governments) should encourage entrepreneurship and skill acquisition programmes by providing functional skill training centres with modern facilities in towns and cities.

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