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The Influence of Entrepreneurial Education on Startup Success Rates Among University Graduates in the University of Lagos, Nigeria

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Abstract

Entrepreneurial education has been widely advocated as a tool for reducing youth unemployment and fostering economic growth. This study investigates the influence of entrepreneurial education on the success rates of startups initiated by graduates of the University of Lagos, Nigeria. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected from 150 graduates who had undertaken entrepreneurial courses and subsequently established businesses. Quantitative findings were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analyses, while qualitative insights were drawn from in-depth interviews. Results show a significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial education and startup success, with curriculum relevance, mentorship, and experiential learning emerging as key factors. The study recommends enhancing practical training and industry collaboration within entrepreneurial curricula.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship, Education, Startup, Success Rates, University Graduates*

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Background to the Study

Youth unemployment remains one of the most pressing socio-economic challenges in Nigeria, with millions of graduates leaving higher education institutions annually without corresponding employment opportunities (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2021). In response to this crisis, entrepreneurship has been widely promoted as a viable strategy for job creation, innovation, and sustainable economic development (Adejimola & Olufunmilayo, 2009). Consequently, Nigerian universities, in line with the National Universities Commission (NUC) policy, have integrated entrepreneurial education into their curricula to foster self-reliance and enterprise development among graduates (Nwambam, Nwankwo, & Eze, 2018).

Entrepreneurial education refers to a structured programme designed to develop individuals' entrepreneurial mindset, knowledge, and skills through teaching and experiential learning (Fayolle & Gailly, 2008). Its goal is not merely to produce business owners but to cultivate proactive, opportunity-seeking individuals capable of generating and sustaining viable business ventures. Universities serve as critical incubators for this transformation, providing both theoretical foundations and practical exposure necessary for entrepreneurial success (Rae, 2010). Despite the widespread implementation of entrepreneurial education in Nigerian universities, there remains a significant gap in understanding how these interventions translate into real-world startup success, particularly within the local context. While several studies have examined the influence of entrepreneurial training on students' intentions to become self-employed (Ojeifo, 2012; Osibanjo, Oyewunmi, & Ojo, 2018), less is known about the actual outcomes of such training post-graduation. It is essential to assess whether the entrepreneurial competencies imparted during university education genuinely equip graduates to establish and sustain successful startups.

In the face of escalating youth unemployment in Nigeria, the need to equip university graduates with entrepreneurial competencies has never been more critical (Adejimola & Olufunmilayo, 2009). The University of Lagos, like many Nigerian institutions, has incorporated entrepreneurial education into its curriculum in response to national policy reforms aimed at promoting self-employment. However, the real impact of this education on the success of student-initiated startups remains underexplored. This study investigates how entrepreneurial education influences the performance and sustainability of startups among graduates of the University of Lagos. The University of Lagos, a leading institution in Nigeria, has been at the forefront of entrepreneurial curriculum integration. However, empirical evaluation of how this education impacts the long-term performance of graduate-led startups is lacking. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the influence of entrepreneurial education on the success rates of startups established by graduates of the University of Lagos. Specifically, it explores how components such as curriculum relevance, experiential learning, and mentorship contribute to the sustainability and growth of these ventures.

Literature Review

Entrepreneurial education refers to formal instruction aimed at equipping individuals with the knowledge, skills, and mindset necessary to initiate and sustain business ventures (Fayolle & Gailly, 2008). It involves both theoretical and experiential learning components such as

opportunity recognition, business planning, financial literacy, innovation management, and risk assessment. The goal is not only to foster business creation but also to develop entrepreneurial attitudes such as creativity, resilience, and self-efficacy (Gibb, 2002; Nabi et al., 2017). In the Nigerian context, entrepreneurial education was formally integrated into university curricula in 2006 as a response to high graduate unemployment (Ojeifo, 2012).

Entrepreneurial education has been found to significantly influence entrepreneurial intentions and competencies (Martin, McNally, & Kay, 2013). In Nigeria, Ojeifo (2012) observed that universities play a critical role in preparing students for self-employment. Similarly, Osibanjo et al. (2018) reported that exposure to entrepreneurial training positively impacted business ideation and implementation among graduates. However, some scholars argue that educational programmes are often too theoretical and disconnected from the realities of the business world (Nzewi et al., 2016). Therefore, experiential learning methods such as internships, business plan competitions, and mentorship are recommended as more effective (Rae, 2010).

A strong body of literature suggests that entrepreneurial education significantly influences students' entrepreneurial intentions, which is often considered a precursor to startup creation (Pittaway & Cope, 2007; Izedonmi & Okafor, 2010). In a Nigerian study, Obaji and Olugu (2014) found that exposure to entrepreneurship courses increased students' desire to pursue self-employment. Similarly, Olokundun et al. (2017) reported that entrepreneurial pedagogies that include business plan development and mentorship positively impacted students' willingness to engage in startup ventures post-graduation.

While entrepreneurial intention has been widely studied, recent research is shifting towards examining actual startup outcomes of graduates. Entrepreneurial education influences not only whether a graduate starts a business but also the success rate, defined by metrics such as business survival, profitability, and growth (Martin, McNally, & Kay, 2013). Souitaris, Zerbinati, and Al-Laham (2007) found that entrepreneurial programmes in European universities significantly improved students' real-life venture creation and business success. In sub-Saharan Africa, Adewale (2020) demonstrated that students exposed to experiential learning components, such as internships and business simulations, exhibited higher startup sustainability.

The unique challenges facing startups in Nigeria—such as infrastructural deficiencies, limited access to finance, and policy inconsistency—mean that university graduates require robust preparation to thrive as entrepreneurs (Adebayo & Kolawole, 2013). Universities like the University of Lagos have adopted enterprise-focused centres to bridge this gap. According to Okoli and Agwu (2015), entrepreneurial ecosystems that include incubation support, industry partnerships, and mentorship significantly enhance startup success rates. However, Onyema (2019) argues that many Nigerian universities still face implementation challenges due to inadequate funding and lack of qualified facilitators. While prior studies have explored the effect of entrepreneurial education on entrepreneurial intention, there is limited empirical research focusing on startup performance among graduates in the Nigerian context,

particularly at the University of Lagos. Most available studies are cross-sectional and do not link the content and delivery of entrepreneurship education to measurable startup outcomes. Moreover, the role of specific variables such as curriculum quality, experiential exposure, and institutional support mechanisms remains underexplored (Fayolle, Verzat, & Wapshott, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Human Capital Theory, which posits that education and training enhance individuals' productive capacities, leading to improved economic outcomes (Becker, 1993). Entrepreneurial education develops both cognitive and non-cognitive skills essential for business performance, including decision-making, opportunity evaluation, and strategic thinking. Additionally, Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) offers a psychological perspective, suggesting that entrepreneurial intention—often an outcome of education—significantly predicts entrepreneurial behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Krueger et al., 2000).

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive survey design within a mixed-methods framework. Quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews.

Population and Sample

The population comprised graduates of the University of Lagos from the 2017–2021 cohorts who had undertaken the compulsory entrepreneurial studies course and subsequently established businesses. Using purposive sampling, 150 respondents were selected for the quantitative survey, with 10 of these chosen for in-depth interviews.

Data Collection and Analysis

Questionnaires assessed respondents' perceptions of entrepreneurial education, entrepreneurial skill acquisition, and business performance. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS version 25, employing descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and regression analyses. Qualitative data were analysed thematically.

Data Analysis and Discussion

A total of 150 respondents, all University of Lagos graduates who had received entrepreneurial education, participated in the study. Data were collected through structured questionnaires designed to capture their perceptions of entrepreneurial education, the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills, and the performance of their startup ventures.

Analytical Tools and Techniques

The data were analysed using SPSS version 25. The following analyses were conducted:

a. Descriptive statistics to summarise respondents' demographic characteristics and key study variables.

b. Pearson correlation analysis to examine the relationships between entrepreneurial education, entrepreneurial skill acquisition, and startup success.
c. Regression analysis to assess the predictive influence of entrepreneurial education and skill acquisition on startup success rates.

Descriptive Statistics

Respondents' ages ranged from 22 to 35 years. Males constituted 60% of the sample, while females made up 40%. The majority (70%) indicated that they had started a business within two years of graduation. Mean scores for perceptions of entrepreneurial education and skill acquisition were above average, reflecting generally favourable views.

Table 1.

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perception of Entrepreneurial Education	4.12	0.75
Entrepreneurial Skill Acquisition	3.95	0.82
Startup Business Performance (Success)	3.88	0.90

(Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree)

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variables	1	2	3
1. Perception of Entrepreneurial Education	1		
2. Entrepreneurial Skill Acquisition	0.68**	1	
3. Startup Business Performance (Success)	0.54**	0.60**	1

p < 0.01 (2-tailed)

a. There is a strong positive correlation between entrepreneurial education and skill acquisition (r = 0.68).
b. Entrepreneurial education is moderately correlated with startup success (r = 0.54).
c. Entrepreneurial skill acquisition is also moderately correlated with startup success (r = 0.60).

Regression Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which entrepreneurial education and skill acquisition predict startup success.

Table 3

Predictor Variable	B	SE B	Beta	t	p
Entrepreneurial Education	0.35	0.08	0.38	4.38	<0.001
Entrepreneurial Skill Acquisition	0.42	0.09	0.45	4.67	<0.001

R^2 = 0.48, F(2,147) = 67.68, p < 0.001

Interpretation:

a. Both entrepreneurial education and skill acquisition significantly predict startup business success.
b. Together, they explain 48% of the variance in startup success rates among the respondents.
c. Entrepreneurial skill acquisition has a slightly stronger influence than entrepreneurial education perception.

Discussion of Findings

The results indicate that entrepreneurial education positively influences the success rates of startups among graduates of the University of Lagos, reinforcing the view that well-structured entrepreneurial programmes contribute significantly to business outcomes. The strong correlation observed between entrepreneurial education and skill acquisition suggests that educational programmes effectively translate theoretical knowledge into practical entrepreneurial competencies, which subsequently enhance business performance. The regression analysis further reveals that, while both factors are important, the acquisition of entrepreneurial skills exerts a more direct and pronounced effect on startup success than simply the perception or awareness of entrepreneurial education. This finding highlights the critical importance of practical skill development within educational curricula. These results are consistent with prior research emphasizing experiential learning and the application of skills as vital for fostering successful entrepreneurial ventures among graduates.

Moreover, the findings support earlier studies demonstrating the positive role of entrepreneurial education in improving business success (Fayolle & Gailly, 2008; Osibanjo et al., 2018). The significant influence of curriculum relevance and mentorship aligns with Rae's (2010) call for practical engagement in entrepreneurship education. The success rates recorded among graduates suggest that entrepreneurial education not only shapes entrepreneurial intentions but also enhances the actual performance of startups in real-world settings.

Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the influence of entrepreneurial education on the success rates of startups initiated by graduates of the University of Lagos, Nigeria. The result of the data analysis confirmed that entrepreneurial education significantly improves startup success rates by cultivating essential entrepreneurial skills among university graduates. Graduates of the University of Lagos who have undergone entrepreneurial education are more likely to develop competencies that positively impact their business performance. To maximize the benefits of entrepreneurial education, educational institutions should priorities the development of practical skills in areas such as business planning, financial management, and marketing strategies.

Recommendations

1. Enhance Practical Components: Expand experiential learning opportunities through internships, business simulations, and real-world projects.
2. Strengthen Industry Linkages: Facilitate regular engagement between students and

successful entrepreneurs to foster knowledge exchange and networking.

3. Improve Curriculum Relevance: Ensure curricula are continuously updated to reflect current market trends, technological advances, and innovative business practices.
4. Provide Continuous Mentorship: Establish a structured alumni mentorship programme to support graduates throughout their entrepreneurial journey.
5. Monitor and Evaluate: Implement robust mechanisms to track the progress of graduate startups and assess long-term business outcomes.

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