

ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS: INNOVATIVE APPROACHES FOR ENHANCING GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship education in Nigerian tertiary institutions has emerged as a strategic tool for addressing youth unemployment and fostering sustainable economic development. This paper explores entrepreneurship education in Nigerian tertiary institutions: Innovative approaches for enhancing graduate employability. Key approaches identified include employability skills, experiential learning, problem-based learning, business incubation programs, design thinking, and the integration of digital platforms and simulations. These methods shift focus from traditional theory-based instruction to practical, skills-driven models that had better prepare students for the dynamic labour market. However, challenges such as inadequate funding, outdated curricula, limited industry-academic collaboration, and lack of qualified entrepreneurship educators hinder effective implementation. To overcome these barriers, the study suggested strategic reforms including curriculum redesign, capacity building for educators, stronger industry partnerships, and increased institutional involvement and investment in entrepreneurship development centres. These innovations are essential for equipping graduates with the creative, adaptable, and business-ready competencies necessary for meaningful participation in the economy

Keywords: Entrepreneurship Education, Innovative Approaches, Graduate Employability, Challenges and Strategies.

Introduction

In the 21st-century knowledge economy, entrepreneurship education has emerged as a vital mechanism for equipping graduates with the skills and mindset required to thrive in increasingly complex labour markets. Nigeria, with its large youth population and persistent

unemployment challenges, particularly among graduates, faces a pressing need to rethink and reform how entrepreneurship is taught in its tertiary institutions. Traditional approaches dominated by theory-based lectures and limited practical exposure seems to have proven insufficient in addressing the dynamic demands of today's economy or in preparing students to become job creators rather than job seekers (Okebukola, 2020; NUC, 2022). Innovative approaches such as project-based learning, design thinking, experiential simulations, business incubators, and digital entrepreneurship tools offer transformative opportunities in this regard.

To be specific, these strategies emphasize active learning, critical thinking, collaboration, and practical application of entrepreneurial concepts. When integrated into tertiary education, they can significantly enhance graduate employability, increase entrepreneurial intention, and foster job creation contributing meaningfully to national economic growth (Fayolle & Gailly, 2015; Olugbola, 2017).

Furthermore, Nigeria has renewed focus on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), digital literacy, and the inclusion of entrepreneurship as a general studies requirement reflects the policy momentum toward practical and inclusive reforms (FRN, 2013; UNESCO, 2022). However, the role of innovative pedagogical methods in revitalizing entrepreneurship education in Nigerian tertiary institutions becomes very necessary because entrepreneurship education enhances graduate employability and graduate employability drives labour productivity labour productivity coupled with innovation fuels national economic growth.

Concept of Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship is simply the willingness and ability of an individual to seek for investment opportunities, to establish and to run an enterprise successfully. Entrepreneurship education refers to the structured teaching and learning processes that aim to equip individuals especially students with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, motivation and values necessary to identify business opportunities, innovate, manage risk, and create successful ventures through such the application of the knowledge and skills acquired in school. It is therefore a major source of job creation, empowerment and economic dynamism in our global world. In this vein, Ezeudu (2018) defined entrepreneurship education as education that provides training, experience and skills that are suitable for entrepreneurship endeavours.

This is to say that, during the course of learning entrepreneurship, students at this level gain prerequisite basic skill like ability to identify career option, understanding economics and free enterprise, competency awareness and creative application and so on. The key elements are business idea development, innovation and creativity, risk management, business planning and financial literacy, start-up and management skills. entrepreneurship education is purposefully undertaking to develop entrepreneurial mindsets and competencies among students, enabling them to become job creators rather than job seekers. However, given Nigeria's high youth unemployment rate, entrepreneurship education has become vital in tertiary institutions to empower graduates with self-reliance and employability skills.

Concept of Innovative Approaches

Innovative approaches refer to creative, learner-centred, and often technology-integrated teaching methods that go beyond traditional lecture-based instruction. These approaches aim to improve student engagement, skill acquisition, critical thinking, and real-world application especially in disciplines like entrepreneurship education, science, and vocational studies. According to Olugbara and Letseka (2021) the key features of innovative pedagogical approaches are:

Student-Centred Learning: The shifts focus from the teacher to the learner and encourages autonomy, participation, and self-directed learning.

Active Learning Techniques: Here, students engage in hands-on activities, such as simulations, role-plays, debates, or case studies.

Problem-Based and Project-Based Learning: The learners tackle real-life problems and develop practical solutions, fostering analytical and decision-making skills.

Technology-Enhanced Learning: This is the use of digital tools such as virtual labs, educational apps, learning management systems (LMS), and Artificial Intelligence to support personalized instruction.

Collaborative and Peer Learning: This involves teamwork, group discussions, and peer assessments, encouraging communication and leadership skills.

Experiential and Reflective Learning: This emphasizes learning through experience (e.g., internships, community service, and start-up labs) and reflective thinking on what is learned.

In Nigeria, where traditional rote learning is still dominant in many tertiary institutions, adopting innovative pedagogical approaches can:

7. Bridge the gap between theory and practice.
8. Equip students with 21st-century skills.
9. Promote graduate employability and entrepreneurship.
10. Drive national economic growth by producing job creators rather than job seekers.

Concept of Graduate Employability

Graduate employability refers to the ability of university or college graduates to gain employment, retain it, and progress in the job market. It encompasses a mix of cognitive, interpersonal, and technical skills, along with attitudes that enable graduates to adapt to workplace demands. According to Okolie (2020) some of the core employability skills are:

- (iv) Communication and teamwork
- (v) Critical thinking and problem-solving

- (vi) ICT proficiency
- (vii) Adaptability and lifelong learning
- (viii) Entrepreneurial and business acumen

More significantly, in an increasingly competitive job market, graduates must not only possess academic qualifications but also practical, transferable skills aligned with labour market needs. Therefore, the role of education and entrepreneurship is that, when education systems produce employable graduates and entrepreneurs, they contribute to:

- xi. Job creation
- xii. Innovation and industrial expansion
- xiii. Reduction in poverty and social inequality
- xiv. Increased tax revenues and investment.

Employability skills require of Students through Entrepreneurship Education

These employability skills not only enhance the self-development of Nigerian graduates but also contribute directly to job creation, innovation, and sustainable economic growth in Nigeria. By integrating these competencies through entrepreneurship education, tertiary institutions play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between education and employment. The skills are:

Innovative and Creative Thinking: Students must be trained to think outside the box, identify business opportunities, and develop novel products or services that address unmet needs.

Digital Literacy and ICT Proficiency: Entrepreneurship education need to increasingly integrates digital tools in students, encouraging them to develop tech-driven ventures or market via digital platforms (Adebayo & Daramola, 2023).

Financial Literacy and Resource Management: Students need learn to prepare business plans, manage budgets, understand markets, and raise funds skills essential for starting and running businesses.

Leadership and Teamwork Skills: Entrepreneurship programs must train students to collaborate, lead business teams, and manage group dynamics skills critical to employability.

Financial Literacy and Resource Management: Students need learn to prepare business plans, manage budgets, understand markets, and raise funds skills essential for starting and running businesses.

Time and Project Management: Entrepreneurial tasks such as planning, launching, and scaling ventures must be developed in students to learn to prioritize, meet deadlines, and manage multiple tasks effectively (Adewale, 2023).

Ethical Reasoning and Social Responsibility: Programs often include business ethics and sustainability modules, encouraging students to consider the broader social impact of their ventures.

Negotiation and Persuasion Skills: In pitching ventures, sourcing funding, or managing partnerships, students need develop the ability to negotiate and influence others. These are some specific skill students need develop to be able to be employable and ti create jobs.

Adaptability and Resilience: Entrepreneurship training need encourage a growth mindset and prepares students to deal with business failure, market shifts, and job uncertainty (Ugwoke & Ezeani, 2021).

Innovative Approaches for enhancing Graduate Employability

These approaches, though underutilized in many Nigerian tertiary institutions, have been shown to enhance entrepreneurial thinking, graduate employability, and national economic resilience when adopted in other contexts. To implement them, institutions must invest in digital infrastructure, industry partnerships, curriculum reforms, and capacity building for educators.

Flipped Classroom for Entrepreneurship: Instead of traditional lectures, students access video content and readings outside class and use classroom time for practical business development, problem-solving, and coaching which encourages self-directed learning and real-time feedback. The kind of approach is rarely implemented due to limited digital infrastructure and faculty readiness.

Entrepreneur-in-Residence (EIR) Programs: Professional entrepreneurs are embedded in departments for extended periods to mentor, co-teach, and inspire students purposefully to exposes students to real business experience and real-time coaching. Though this way according to Wright (2017) are extremely rare or informal in our tertiary institutions.

Crowdfunding Simulation Platforms: Teaching students to pitch and raise funds on simulated or real crowdfunding platforms (e.g., Kickstarter, GoFundMe) as part of their business projects which enhances digital marketing, storytelling, and financial planning skills. Largely unexplored (Belleflamme, Lambert & Schwienbacher, 2012).

Virtual Reality (VR) Business Scenarios: Using VR simulations to immerse students in virtual startup environments, business negotiations, or market challenges which basically promotes experiential learning, emotional engagement, and critical decision-making.

Startup Shadowing Programs: Students spend weeks shadowing a startup founder or working in a live startup as a mandatory course requirement. The offers firsthand exposure to startup dynamics and business realities. This may not have been systematically institutionalized in many tertiary institutions.

Block chain for Entrepreneurial Record Keeping: Incorporating blockchain simulations in entrepreneurship courses to teach students how to manage digital ledgers for inventory,

payment, or smart contracts. This prepares students for future digital economies and trust-based systems. Prepares students for future digital economies and trust-based systems. Not yet introduced in entrepreneurship education (Tapscott & Tapscott, 2016).

Peer-to-Peer (P2P) Entrepreneurship Mentorship Networks: Establishing structured, rotating mentorship between students across disciplines and levels to promote knowledge-sharing and business co-creation. It builds collaborative, cross-sectoral business thinking and leadership.

Gamification of Business Processes: Using reward systems, point-scoring, competition elements, and narrative game formats to teach budgeting, innovation, and marketing. This increases student motivation and improves engagement with complex entrepreneurial concepts. But it has been minimally adoption beyond basic business games (Landers, 2014).

Interdisciplinary Entrepreneurship Studios: Cross-faculty entrepreneurship labs (e.g., business, agriculture, engineering etc.) where students co-create marketable ventures to promotes diverse skill application and fosters scalable innovation. This has attracted very limited integration across departments. This is supported by Nambisan, (2017).

Global Virtual Teams and Entrepreneurship Projects: Partnering students with international peers online to develop joint ventures or products. This helps to builds cross-cultural collaboration, remote business competencies, and global market awareness.

Peculiar Challenges Student Face that Hinders Entrepreneurship Education

Lack of Motivation and Entrepreneurial Mindset: Considering various experiences shared by researchers, many students seem to view entrepreneurship education as just another academic requirement rather than a real-world empowerment tool. This lack of intrinsic motivation or interest can reduce their engagement and hinder skill acquisition.

Poor Financial Literacy and Inadequate Capital: From personal experience, it is notable that many students lack basic financial management skills or access to startup capital, making it difficult to transition from ideas to action. Even when they generate viable business ideas, they lack knowledge of funding opportunities or how to prepare business plans and proposals.

Fear of Failure and Risk Aversion: The fear of business failure or making financial losses discourages many students from applying entrepreneurial lessons in practice. This fear is often reinforced by societal expectations to seek "safe" white-collar jobs (Olokundun et al., 2017).

Limited Practical Exposure: In most cases, especially in our tertiary institution environment, many students are not opportune to interact with real entrepreneurs, visit business incubators, or undertake internships in startups. This limits their real-world understanding of business operations.

Information Gap on Opportunities: There is often a lack of awareness among students about entrepreneurial competitions, funding schemes (e.g., Tony Elumelu Foundation, BOI Youth

Entrepreneurship Fund, ECOWAS Youth Employability Project for Nigerians), and training programs, which limits their access to external support.

Peer Pressure and Societal Influence: Some students experience pressure to conform to traditional career paths (e.g., law, medicine, banking), especially in families that value status over innovation or entrepreneurship. This can suppress entrepreneurial ambition.

Digital Illiteracy: In today's economy, digital tools are essential for entrepreneurship. Some students still lack digital skills (e.g., e-commerce, digital marketing, online payment systems), which puts them at a disadvantage in the tech-driven business landscape (Yusuf & Dansu, 2021).

Time Constraints and Academic Overload: Heavy academic workloads make it hard for students to dedicate time to business development or participate in entrepreneurial programs, workshops, or bootcamps.

Other Challenges Affecting Graduate Employability due to Approaches used by Tertiary Institution

Mismatch Between Curriculum and Labour Market Needs: There is little alignment between entrepreneurship curriculum and the current demands of Nigeria's labour market, leading to unemployable graduates who lack relevant enterprise skills. (Nwambam & Udu, 2020).

Predominantly Theoretical Curriculum: Entrepreneurship is mostly taught through lectures and textbook theory, with limited exposure to real-world business environments. This approach fails to equip graduates with practical, market-relevant skills (Oduwaiye, 2021).

Lack of Practical Skill Development: Many institutions do not incorporate hands-on training, workshops, or startup incubation programs, which are essential for building business competencies and self-employability (Olokundun et al., 2018).

Outdated Pedagogical Approaches: Traditional lecture-based methods dominate, neglecting innovative strategies like design thinking, business simulations, and digital entrepreneurship labs that foster creativity and adaptability (Adegbite, 2023).

Poor Industry-Academic Linkages: Weak collaboration between universities and industries limits opportunities for internships, mentorships, and real-world business exposure, making it difficult for students to transition into entrepreneurial roles (Iwu & Eze, 2020).

Inadequate Funding and Resources: Entrepreneurship programs often lack funding for facilities, business incubation hubs, technology, and startup grants, which are crucial for student ventures and skill development (Udu & Eze, 2021).

Strategies to Promote Innovative Approaches to Entrepreneurship Education for Graduate Employability

Reforming entrepreneurship education through innovative pedagogical approaches is key to producing employable graduates and driving national economic transformation. A shift toward practical, industry-linked, and technology-enabled teaching can position Nigerian tertiary graduates as job creators rather than job seekers.

Curriculum Redesign and Practical Integration: There is need to update entrepreneurship curricula to include experiential learning, project-based tasks, problem-solving, and digital entrepreneurship skills that align with real-world demands. This is supported by Olokundun et al. (2020) who emphasized embedding real-world entrepreneurial challenges into academic learning so that student can develop practical skills that will aid their creativity.

Adoption of Technology-Driven Learning Tools: Introduce tools like virtual simulations, online business platforms, AI tutors, and e-learning apps to encourage digital entrepreneurship and flexible learning. This is supported by Adebayo and Kolawole (2022) who advocated for using technology to simulate real business environments.

Stronger Industry-Academia Collaboration: Partner with industries for internships, mentorship programs, business challenges, and guest lectures, ensuring the curriculum aligns with labour market demands. On this note, Iwu and Eze (2021) emphasized partnerships for experiential learning and enterprise exposure to student to build their realistic awareness and possible practices.

Establishment of Incubation Centres and Start-Up Hubs: Tertiary institutions need create on-campus incubation centres, maker spaces, and innovation labs to help students test and grow their business ideas with guidance and support from successful entrepreneurs. Adegbite and Aina (2023) argued that students need to be well placed in this business of training them to be potential entrepreneurs by creating such incubation centres that promotes entrepreneurial creativity and job creation.

Faculty Capacity Building in Entrepreneurship Pedagogy: Lecturers need to be regularly trained to update modern instructional techniques, entrepreneurial thinking, digital platforms, and mentoring skills to improve delivery quality. Nwankwo and Ifedili (2022) had stressed on this when they mentioned continuous professional development for entrepreneurship educators to align their current activities with innovative entrepreneurial practices.

Promote Interdisciplinary Entrepreneurship Education: Integrate entrepreneurship courses across disciplines (engineering, arts, health, etc.) to widen participation and diversify skill application to be able to create employability skills overtime. This is why Omolayo (2020) supports cross-disciplinary approaches to build creative and innovative thinking in student through extensive entrepreneurial practice.

Introduce Performance-Based Evaluation Systems: To build real world practical entrepreneurial skills necessary for labour market demand, there is need to replace exam-heavy assessments with pitching competitions, business plan evaluations, and peer-reviewed project work to foster practical competency purposefully to build student's practical employability

skills. Musa and Salami (2021) recommend such real-world assessments to reinforce student learning to be able to create jobs and be employed after graduation.

Policy Support and Increased Funding: There need for government and tertiary institutions to set outside financial aid specifically for entrepreneurship programmes to encourage such trainings and practices. Advocate for national policies that support entrepreneurship education reforms, and provide financial grants, research funds, and resource allocation to institutions by government and other agencies to support this course.

Conclusion

Innovative approaches to entrepreneurship education represent a transformative pathway for enhancing graduate employability and driving national economic growth in Nigeria. By shifting from traditional, theory-based instruction to practical, experiential and technology-driven learning models, tertiary institutions can equip students with relevant entrepreneurial skills, creativity, and adaptability needed in today's dynamic labour market. Approaches such as problem-based learning, business simulations, design thinking, digital entrepreneurship, and industry collaborations not only bridge the gap between education and employment but also foster a culture of innovation and self-reliance.

However, the successful implementation of these approaches requires strong institutional commitment, regular curriculum reforms, capacity building for educators, adequate infrastructure, and policy support. When effectively harnessed, these innovative teaching models can produce graduates who are not just job seekers, but also job creators, thus contributing significantly to economic diversification, poverty reduction, and sustainable development in Nigeria. Ultimately, reimagining entrepreneurship education through innovative pedagogy is not only necessary for individual empowerment but also essential for the nation's economic future.

Suggestions

In today's economy, digital tools are essential for entrepreneurship. Some students still lack digital skills (e.g., e-commerce, digital marketing, online payment systems), which puts them at a disadvantage in the tech-driven business landscape. Therefore, a shift toward practical, industry-linked, and technology-enabled teaching can position Nigerian tertiary graduates as job creators rather than job seekers. On this note, the following suggestions are put forward that tertiary institutions and government can practically embark on.

Revise and Localize Entrepreneurship Curriculum: Curricula must be context-specific, addressing local economic realities and opportunities (e.g., agribusiness, renewable energy, tech start-ups). Institutions should embed problem-based and competency-based models that foster employability and self-employment.

Strengthen Industry-Academia Partnerships: Tertiary institutions should develop internship placements, mentorship schemes, and collaborative training with industries to give students practical insights and align entrepreneurial education with real market demands.

Enhance Digital Entrepreneurship Education: Nigerian institutions should integrate AI, blockchain, digital marketing, and e-commerce tools in entrepreneurship teaching. These prepare students for modern digital economies, remote work, and global start-up ecosystems.

Establish University-Based Business Incubation Hubs: Creating on-campus innovation and incubation centres enables students to develop business ideas with access to mentorship, seed funding, and professional networks. This bridges academic learning with real-world business practice, enhancing readiness for the job market.

Integrate Experiential and Project-Based Learning: Tertiary institutions should shift from theoretical teaching to hands-on experiences, where students run real or simulated businesses, engage in fieldwork, or manage start-up projects. This improves decision-making, risk-taking, and creativity key traits for entrepreneurial success.

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