



Acquiring Entrepreneurial Skills for Sustainable Development: Case for a New Senior Secondary School Curriculum in Nigeria

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship has emerged as a key driver of economic growth, innovation, and sustainable development in modern economies. In Nigeria, where youth unemployment and economic inequality present significant challenges, entrepreneurship offers a viable solution for job creation, social mobility, and economic diversification. This article examines the role of entrepreneurial skills in fostering both personal and national development, with a specific focus on their integration into the Nigerian secondary school curriculum. The study explores the critical role entrepreneurial education plays in equipping students with the skills necessary to navigate an increasingly complex and competitive labour market. By analysing the current state of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian secondary schools, this article identifies existing gaps and proposes strategies to enhance the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education. These strategies include curriculum reforms, improved teacher training, and increased emphasis on experiential learning. The findings underscore the importance of a well-rounded entrepreneurial education in addressing Nigeria's economic challenges and advancing the nation's broader sustainable development goals. Lastly, the article advocates for a more robust integration of entrepreneurial skills into the education system to empower Nigeria's youth and spur long-term national growth.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Education; Entrepreneurial Skills; Curriculum; Sustainable Development.



Introduction

In the 21st century, entrepreneurship has emerged as a critical driver of economic growth and sustainable development. Across the globe, entrepreneurial activities are transforming industries, enhancing competitiveness, and creating new opportunities for individuals and communities. Modern economies are increasingly reliant on entrepreneurial innovation not only to foster job creation, but also to address key issues such as technological advancement, wealth redistribution, and societal transformation. This is especially pertinent in developing economies, where entrepreneurship is seen as a vital mechanism for addressing unemployment and poverty, improving standards of living, and bridging inequality gaps.

Entrepreneurial skills, therefore, play a crucial role in equipping individuals to navigate the complexities of modern economies. These skills enable individuals to identify opportunities, take calculated risks, and manage resources efficiently to bring new ideas to market. For developing nations such as Nigeria, entrepreneurship is not only important for economic growth, but also critical for addressing pressing social issues, including the persistent challenges of youth unemployment and social inequality. Nigeria, with its large youth population, faces immense pressure to provide jobs and create sustainable economic opportunities. The country's youth unemployment rate reached 42.5% in 2022: presenting a significant economic and social challenge (International Labour Organization, 2023). Entrepreneurship offers a pathway to mitigate these issues by encouraging self-reliance and fostering innovation.

Entrepreneurship plays a pivotal role in achieving several of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of United Nations, particularly those related to decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), industry, innovation, and infrastructure (SDG 9), and reducing inequality (SDG 10) (Abubakar & Aliyu, 2021). By cultivating entrepreneurial mind-sets, individuals are equipped to solve complex societal problems, stimulate innovation, and create economic opportunities that contribute to inclusive and sustainable development. For example, research has demonstrated that entrepreneurship not only reduces poverty, but also accelerates social progress by creating new industries and sectors that promote inclusive economic growth (Azamat, Fayzullokh, & Nilufar, 2023).

In recognition of the importance of entrepreneurship, many countries have integrated entrepreneurship education into their formal school curricula. This is underpinned by the recognition that early exposure to entrepreneurial concepts can inspire a generation of problem-solvers who are capable of creating value in their communities and beyond. In Nigeria, the federal government has undertaken initiatives to incorporate entrepreneurship education into the secondary school curriculum, aligning with global trends to equip students with skills that prepare them for the evolving labour market (Federal Ministry of Education, 2018). However, the extent to which these efforts have been effective in promoting entrepreneurial skills and mindsets among secondary school students remains a subject of inquiry.

Entrepreneurship education at the secondary level is of critical importance as it provides the foundation for students to develop creative problem-solving skills, adaptability, and resilience: qualities that are essential for success in both the entrepreneurial and corporate worlds. However, the implementation of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian schools faces several challenges, including limited resources, inadequate teacher training, and a lack of alignment between the curriculum and real-world entrepreneurial needs (Ojo & Okwilagwe, 2024). As a result, the full potential of entrepreneurship education as a tool for national development has not yet been realised.



The Nigerian government's approach to entrepreneurship education in the secondary school curriculum focuses on exploring how the integration of entrepreneurial skills could contribute to both personal and national development. In particular, entrepreneurial education can equip students with the competencies needed to address the challenges of unemployment and contribute to economic growth through innovation and enterprise. Furthermore, this study identifies gaps in the current educational framework and proposes strategies for enhancing entrepreneurship education in secondary schools across Nigeria. By addressing these gaps, Nigeria can better harness the transformative power of entrepreneurship to drive sustainable development and economic diversification in an increasingly competitive global economy.

Entrepreneurship in the Nigerian Secondary School Curriculum

The Nigerian secondary school curriculum has undergone several reforms over the years, with a growing emphasis on vocational and entrepreneurial education. Recognising the pressing need to equip students with the skills required to navigate a rapidly evolving economy, the Nigerian government introduced entrepreneurship education as part of its broader educational reform strategy. The aim is to prepare students for self-employment, foster creativity, and empower them with practical skills that can be applied across various sectors, thereby reducing youth unemployment and promoting economic growth (Federal Ministry of Education, 2018). However, despite these reforms, concerns remain regarding the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian schools.

One of the significant challenges facing the implementation of entrepreneurship education in secondary schools is the lack of qualified teachers with practical entrepreneurial experience. While the curriculum emphasises the importance of entrepreneurship, the delivery of this content often falls short due to inadequate teacher training. Most teachers are not equipped with the necessary entrepreneurial skills and knowledge to effectively teach students about business creation, management, and innovation. According to Nkanta (2023), the lack of trained educators is one of the key barriers to successful entrepreneurship education in Nigeria, as teachers often rely on outdated methods that fail to inspire or engage students in meaningful entrepreneurial activities.

In addition to the shortage of qualified teachers, the inadequate provision of resources and infrastructure further hampers the effective delivery of entrepreneurship education. Schools often lack the necessary tools, materials, and technology to create an enabling learning environment for practical entrepreneurial activities. For instance, entrepreneurship courses require resources such as business simulations, project-based learning, and mentorship programmes to provide students with experiential learning opportunities (Lackéus, 2020). However, these elements are often missing in many Nigerian secondary schools, making it difficult for students to translate theoretical knowledge into practical skills that are relevant to the real world.

Moreover, the current curriculum is largely skewed towards technical and vocational skills, with less emphasis on critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, which are core components of entrepreneurial success. While technical skills are essential, they must be complemented by soft skills such as leadership, communication, and adaptability, which are critical for identifying opportunities and overcoming challenges in entrepreneurial ventures. Bell (2024) emphasised that entrepreneurship education in Nigerian schools often fails to incorporate creativity and innovation into its teaching, leaving students ill-prepared to compete in an increasingly dynamic and competitive global economy.



There is also a growing consensus that entrepreneurship education in Nigeria is not sufficiently aligned with the realities of the labour market. The curriculum tends to focus on traditional forms of vocational training, such as carpentry, tailoring and welding, while neglecting the modern entrepreneurial landscape, which is increasingly shaped by digital technologies, e-commerce platforms, and global service outsourcing (Adekunle, 2024). For instance, while students may be taught how to sew clothing, they are rarely introduced to online fashion retailing, branding or using social media platforms like Instagram or TikTok to promote their products. Similarly, there is little emphasis on teaching skills such as web design, digital marketing, app development or running an online business on platforms such as Shopify or Jumia.

To address these gaps, it is essential to reform the curriculum to provide students with both hands-on technical skills and the ability to think critically and creatively about entrepreneurial opportunities. For instance, students should be exposed to case studies of successful Nigerian tech entrepreneurs, workshops on writing business plans, and simulation exercises for pitching start-up ideas. By incorporating a more holistic approach to entrepreneurship education—one that blends practical training with digital literacy, innovation skills and exposure to global markets—students can develop the competencies needed to navigate the complexities of modern entrepreneurship and contribute meaningfully to national development.

A further area of concern is the need for more experiential learning opportunities. While the curriculum may introduce students to entrepreneurship concepts, they have limited opportunity to apply their knowledge in real-world settings. Business simulations, internships and mentorship programmes are essential for bridging the gap between theory and practice, allowing students to gain first-hand experience in starting and managing businesses (Mohammed, 2022). These hands-on learning experiences help students develop critical skills such as decision-making, financial management and risk assessment, which are crucial for entrepreneurial success. Unfortunately, many Nigerian secondary schools lack the resources and infrastructure to offer these opportunities, further limiting the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education.

Entrepreneurship is increasingly recognised as powerful tool for addressing unemployment, fostering innovation, and driving sustainable development in Nigeria. By equipping students with entrepreneurial skills, the Nigerian education system can play a pivotal role in preparing the next generation of innovators, problem-solvers and job creators. However, to fully realise the potential of entrepreneurship education, it is imperative to improve the quality of instruction, provide more hands-on learning experiences and ensure that students are exposed to the full spectrum of entrepreneurial competencies.

Addressing the challenges of inadequate teacher training, limited resources and the lack of experiential learning opportunities requires a comprehensive reform of the entrepreneurship education curriculum. Incorporating of both practical and soft skills, alongside a stronger focus on creativity, critical thinking and real-world application, will better prepare students to thrive in a competitive global economy. Through these reforms, Nigeria can harness the transformative power of entrepreneurship to build a more inclusive and prosperous economy, ultimately reducing unemployment and promoting sustainable national development.



Entrepreneurial Skills: Definition and Importance

Entrepreneurial skills refer to a broad set of abilities and competencies that empower individuals to identify opportunities, innovate, and efficiently manage resources to create value. These skills are essential not only for starting and running businesses but also for navigating various challenges in multiple sectors of the economy. In a rapidly changing global landscape, characterized by technological advancements, market disruptions, and evolving consumer demands, entrepreneurial skills foster critical thinking, resilience, adaptability, and problem-solving. These qualities are vital for success in both entrepreneurial ventures and the broader professional world.

According to Herrity (2022) entrepreneurial skills are not limited to traditional business activities such as starting a company. She asserted that they also encompass a range of competencies that enable individuals to contribute meaningfully to various fields, including education, healthcare, technology, and the creative industries. These skills are valuable in corporate environments where innovation and creativity are essential to sustaining a competitive advantage. As highlighted by the African Development Bank (2020), entrepreneurship is a key driver of economic growth, job creation, and innovation, particularly in developing economies where the youth population is rapidly expanding.

There are three broad categories of entrepreneurial skills that are essential for individuals seeking to create value in today's economy:

Technical Skills: Technical skills refer to industry-specific knowledge and abilities that are crucial for creating and managing businesses. These skills are particularly important in sectors requiring specialized expertise, such as technology, manufacturing, and digital services. For instance, in the digital economy, technical skills may include coding, data analysis, cybersecurity, and the use of digital platforms for marketing, sales, and customer engagement. Entrepreneurs with strong technical skills are better equipped to develop products and services that meet market demands and leverage technology to scale their businesses. In addition, technical skills allow entrepreneurs to understand the intricacies of their industry and implement innovative solutions that enhance operational efficiency (Boldureanu et al, 2024).

Management Skills: Management skills are critical for planning, organising, and directing business operations. Entrepreneurs need to manage a variety of resources, including financial capital, human resources, and time, to achieve business goals. Key management competencies include financial management, project management, strategic decision-making, and operational oversight. Effective financial management involves budgeting, forecasting, and controlling expenditures to ensure long-term profitability. Project management enables entrepreneurs to plan, execute, and monitor tasks efficiently, ensuring that business objectives are met on time and within budget. Strategic decision-making, on the other hand, requires entrepreneurs to assess market trends, competition, and risks, and make informed decisions that position their ventures for success. Management skills are fundamental to sustaining growth, scaling businesses, and ensuring that operations run smoothly (Makar, 2023).

Leadership Skills: Leadership skills in entrepreneurship are essential for motivating teams, communicating a clear vision, and guiding organisations toward achieving their goals. Effective leadership requires not only the ability to inspire others but also the courage to take risks and drive innovation in uncertain environments. Entrepreneurs with strong leadership skills can foster a positive organisational culture, build cohesive teams, and navigate challenges that arise in the course of business development. In addition to interpersonal skills,



entrepreneurial leadership involves decision-making under pressure, creativity in solving problems, and the capacity to adapt to changes in the market or industry. Research suggests that entrepreneurial leadership is positively correlated with firm performance, as it drives innovation, enhances productivity, and enables businesses to seize new opportunities (Iqbal, Nazir, & Ahmad, 2022).

These three categories of entrepreneurial skills—technical, management, and leadership—work in tandem to enable individuals to navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship, from ideation to business execution. Successful entrepreneurs must be able to harness technical expertise, manage resources effectively, and lead teams to bring innovative ideas to life. Furthermore, entrepreneurial skills are not static; they require continuous learning and adaptation in response to changing market conditions, emerging technologies, and evolving consumer preferences.

Developing entrepreneurial skills is crucial not only for personal empowerment but also for fostering broader economic and social development. Entrepreneurship plays a vital role in job creation, economic diversification, and poverty reduction, particularly in developing economies such as Nigeria. According to the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2023), countries that invest in entrepreneurship education and training report higher levels of innovation, employment creation, and economic diversification. In Nigeria, where unemployment and underemployment are prevalent among the youth, promoting entrepreneurial skills through education can help mitigate these challenges by encouraging self-reliance and creating new economic opportunities.

Entrepreneurship education in schools plays an essential role in equipping young people with the skills they need to succeed in the modern economy. Programmes that promote experiential learning, creativity, and innovation help students develop the competencies necessary to identify opportunities, create solutions, and contribute to national development. Countries that prioritize entrepreneurship education not only benefit from a more resilient and adaptable workforce but also experience greater levels of socio-economic progress. Individuals who possess entrepreneurial skills are better positioned to address societal challenges, create new industries, and stimulate sustainable growth (Ahmad et al, 2023).

The Role of Entrepreneurship in Solving Unemployment and Fostering Innovation

Entrepreneurship plays a pivotal role in addressing unemployment and fostering innovation, contributing significantly to sustainable development. In the Nigerian context, where formal job opportunities are often limited, entrepreneurship offers a valuable alternative, enabling individuals to create their own opportunities and drive economic participation (Maina, 2014). According to Razzaq et al. (2024), this is particularly crucial for marginalised groups, such as women and youth, who face substantial barriers to entering the formal labour market.

Entrepreneurship and Unemployment Reduction

Entrepreneurship is a powerful tool for combating unemployment. In countries such as Nigeria, where formal sector jobs are scarce, entrepreneurship provides a viable pathway for individuals to create their own employment opportunities. By establishing their own businesses, individuals can generate income not only for themselves but also for others, thereby contributing to the broader economy (Abioye & Kolawole, 2024). Several studies have highlighted the positive impact of entrepreneurship on job creation. For example, a World Bank report indicates that small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are crucial for employment



generation in developing economies, including Nigeria (World Bank, 2019). Entrepreneurs create new ventures that can absorb the growing labour force, especially in areas with high youth unemployment. This dynamic is evident in the rise of various entrepreneurial initiatives across Nigeria, where start-ups are addressing gaps in the market and providing employment opportunities.

Entrepreneurship is also particularly beneficial for marginalised groups, including women and youth, who often face additional challenges in securing formal employment. Programmes that support female entrepreneurs, such as the Women's Enterprise Fund in Nigeria, illustrate how targeted interventions can empower women to contribute economically through entrepreneurship (Olawaju & Fernando, 2020). Similarly, youth entrepreneurship programmes provide young people with the skills and resources needed to establish their own businesses, thereby reducing youth unemployment and fostering economic inclusion (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

Entrepreneurship and Innovation

In addition to addressing unemployment, entrepreneurship serves as a catalyst for innovation. Entrepreneurs are often at the forefront of developing new products, services, and business models that respond to market inefficiencies and create value in novel ways (Zha, Guangfen & Zhong, 2016). In Nigeria, the entrepreneurial landscape is characterised by significant innovations across various sectors.

The fintech sector in Nigeria, for example, has seen remarkable growth, with start-ups such as Paystack and Flutterwave revolutionising financial services by providing digital payment solutions that are accessible to a wider segment population (Oloade, 2024). Similarly, agribusinesses are transforming food production through innovative approaches, such as vertical farming and the application of technology for precision agriculture, thereby improving productivity and sustainability in the agriculture sector (Amusan & Oyewole, 2023).

Entrepreneurs contribute to innovation not only by introducing new products but also by improving existing processes and business models. For example, start-ups in Nigeria are harnessing technology to optimise logistics, enhance supply chain efficiency, and offer improved consumer experiences. These innovations create a ripple effect across various industries, leading to heightened efficiency, reduced costs, and enhanced competitiveness (Fayolle et al., 2015).

Policy Interventions and Educational Reforms to Foster Acquisition of Entrepreneurial Skills

To fully harness the potential of entrepreneurship in addressing unemployment and fostering innovation, strategic policy interventions are essential. Education, in particular, plays a pivotal role in preparing the next generation of entrepreneurs. By integrating entrepreneurial skills into the Nigerian secondary school curriculum, students can develop the competencies necessary to identify opportunities, create value, and contribute to economic growth (Ratten & Usmanij, 2021).

Curriculum reforms should prioritise entrepreneurship education that equips students with practical skills and knowledge, such as business planning, financial management, and problem-solving. These skills are essential for successfully launching and effectively managing entrepreneurial ventures (Motta & Galina, 2023). Moreover, experiential learning



opportunities, such as business simulations, internships, and mentorship programmes, can provide students with real-world insights and experiences, further enhancing their entrepreneurial capabilities (Jardim, Bártolo & Pinho, 2021).

Conclusion

In conclusion, entrepreneurship could be a key driver of both employment and innovation in Nigeria. By enabling individuals to create their own opportunities and fostering new ideas, entrepreneurship contributes to economic development and sustainable growth. Strategic policy interventions, including reforms in education, are crucial for maximising the potential of entrepreneurship to address unemployment and drive innovation, ultimately leading to a more dynamic and resilient economy. Entrepreneurship could be a powerful tool for addressing unemployment, fostering innovation, and driving sustainable development in Nigeria. By equipping students with entrepreneurial skills, the Nigerian education system could play a pivotal role in preparing the next generation of innovators, problem-solvers, and job creators. However, to fully realize the potential of entrepreneurship education, there must be concerted efforts to improve the quality of instruction, provide more hands-on learning experiences, and ensure that students are exposed to the full spectrum of entrepreneurial competencies.

Suggestions

The Nigerian secondary school curriculum should include hands-on entrepreneurship modules to enhance problem-solving and financial literacy, adopt project-based learning to foster creativity and leadership, and emphasise sustainable business practices. Teacher training programmes should be implemented to equip educators with entrepreneurship skills, while schools should collaborate with industry experts for mentorship and internships. The curriculum should integrate ICT and digital entrepreneurship, cultivate an entrepreneurial mind-set, and provide funding for student start-ups. Additionally, it should be continuously evaluated for improvement and ensure inclusivity for all students, regardless of gender or background.



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