ENTREPRENEURSHIP CURRICULUM CONTENTS AND ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN NIGERIA

Olokundun Ayodele Maxwell, Covenant University
Ibidunni Ayodotun Stephen, Covenant University
Falola Olubusayo Hezekiah, Covenant University
Salau Odunayo Paul, Covenant University
Oyafunke-Omoniyi C O, Olabisi Onabanjo University

ABSTRACT

The goal of this study was to examine the influence of the contents of an entrepreneurship curriculum as it relates to the entrepreneurial development of university students in Nigeria. In this descriptive research, quantitative content analysis followed by qualitative thematic analysis were used to examine the data collected through a survey and semi structured interviews conducted on entrepreneurship educators in a selected university in Nigeria. Results from the analysis showed that most educators opined that majority of the students in the selected university are able to develop critical thinking abilities and business idea generation competencies. However, the results also showed that the educators were of the opinion that most students are not able develop the confidence, commitment and drive for the achievement of entrepreneurial goals and aspirations at graduation. Therefore, it was recommended that entrepreneurship curricula in Nigerian universities should motivate the development of entrepreneurial mindset and action. The study also recommended the engagement of real life scenarios in practical activities to motivate the development of the drive and commitment required for students to engage in entrepreneurship at graduation.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship Curriculum, Entrepreneurial Development Critical Thinking, Business Idea Generation, Commitment to Entrepreneurial Goals.

INTRODUCTION

An entrepreneurship curriculum regulates the entrepreneurial learning experiences provided by educational institutions (Kourilsky, Allen, Bocage, & Waters 1995; Bassey & Achibong, 2005). This is why the importance of an entrepreneurship curriculum cannot be overemphasized because it is the channel through which the experiences that constitute the life of an entrepreneur are communicated to students (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2004). However, the success of an entrepreneurship curriculum depends largely on the perception of the entrepreneurial needs of students, by the ones involved in the development and implementation of the curriculum (Henry, Hill, & Leitch, 2003).

Entrepreneurial development of university students is described as the development of critical thinking abilities, idea generation competencies and a commitment towards the achievement of entrepreneurial goals at graduation (Caloghirou, Protogerou, & Deligianni 2013;
Gafar, Kasim, & Martin, 2013) Considering the important role of entrepreneurship development of undergraduates in the achievement of desired goals of an entrepreneurship programme, an entrepreneurship curriculum should motivate entrepreneurial development especially because the curriculum is the basic tool and instrument for the conveyance of entrepreneurial learning experiences to students. Many empirical studies provide evidence on the influence of entrepreneurship curriculum on entrepreneurial development of university students in terms of development of critical thinking abilities and business idea generation competencies (Bilic, Prka, & Vidovic 2011; Bodnar, Renee, & Besterfeld-Scacre 2015). Other studies examine the effects of entrepreneurship curriculum contents and entrepreneurial development of university students solely in terms of the influence of the curriculum in motivating students’ commitment for engagement in an entrepreneurial career at graduation.

However, the argument here is that the effectiveness of an entrepreneurship curriculum in the context of entrepreneurial development is not hinged solely on the extent to which the curriculum is able to motivate university students to develop critical thinking abilities and business ideas generation competencies, or only on the development of a commitment by students towards the achievement of entrepreneurial goals at graduation, but relatively a combination of all identified aspects of entrepreneurial development. This is important considering that the translation of learning experiences into entrepreneurial development of students depends on the achievement of all identified aspects of entrepreneurial development (Romer-Paakkanen & Pekkala 2008; Olokundun, 2017). Therefore the goal of this research is to examine the influence of the contents of an entrepreneurship curriculum as it relates to the entrepreneurial development of university students in Nigeria based on the development of critical thinking abilities, business idea generation competencies and commitment towards the achievement of entrepreneurial goals at graduation.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Entrepreneurship education describes the scope of lectures, curricular or programmes that attempt to provide learners with the necessary entrepreneurial competencies, capabilities and attitudes geared towards entrepreneurial development of learners (Ooi, Selvarajah & Meyer, 2011; Moses et al. 2017). It also refers to the conscious effort of an educator targeted at inculcating entrepreneurial competencies and capabilities in students (Ekpoh & Edet, 2011; Moses et al. 2016). Fayolle Kryo & Ulijn (2006) in their presentation defined entrepreneurship education as any pedagogical programme associated with inculcating entrepreneurial abilities and competencies as well as personal qualities in learners. This suggests that the goal of entrepreneurship programmes in Nigeria should not be exclusively hinged on the immediate creation of new businesses but also the entrepreneurial development of students.

Beyond the conventional roles of universities which include motivating economic growth and development through research and development, building entrepreneurial capabilities and competencies has become an added task and important role put on universities by the society (Olorundare & Kayode, 2014). This saddles universities with more responsibilities to meet up with the entrepreneurial needs of students in order to motivate entrepreneurial development potentials. (Wong, 2007, Ifedili & Ofoegbu, 2011). Specifically, salient components related to the entrepreneurial development of university students encompasses the development of critical thinking capabilities, business idea generation competencies and a commitment towards the achievement of entrepreneurial goals and aspirations at graduation (Caloghirou, Protogerou, & Deligianni 2013; Gafar, Kasim, & Martin, 2013). Therefore, it is expected that the contents of
the entrepreneurship curriculum in Nigerian universities should motivate these identified components of entrepreneurial development. This will not only enhance the development of salient entrepreneurial competencies by university students but also increase the likelihood of students’ engagement in entrepreneurial pursuits at graduation.

Various empirical studies within and outside the Nigerian context have examined the effects of the contents of an entrepreneurship curriculum on the entrepreneurial development of university students from different perspectives. The study of Bodnar Renee & Besterfeild-Scacre (2015) showed the provisions in entrepreneurship curriculum content have implications for entrepreneurial development of university students mainly by motivating critical thinking abilities and business idea generation competencies in students. In the same vein the study of Mahajar & Yunus (2012) showed that the role of universities in promoting entrepreneurship development of university students from different perspectives. The study of Bodnar Renee & Besterfeild-Scacre (2015) showed the provisions in entrepreneurship curriculum content have implications for entrepreneurial development of university students mainly by motivating critical thinking abilities and business idea generation competencies in students. In the same vein the study of Mahajar & Yunus (2012) showed that the role of universities in promoting entrepreneurship development of university students is hinged on the provision of entrepreneurial curriculum contents that significantly impacts on students’ inclination towards development of critical thinking competencies. In a similar research carried out by Gafar Kasim & martin (2013) the findings of the study showed that entrepreneurship curriculum in the tertiary institutions affects entrepreneurial development of students by motivating undergraduates to develop innovative business ideas. In the Nigerian University context, findings from the study of Ebringa, Ewenwa, & Ebringa (2015) suggests that entrepreneurial development of university students involves the engagement of students in practical and collaborative entrepreneurial extra curricula activities and mentoring by experienced entrepreneurial minded academic which equips students with critical thinking competencies favourable to entrepreneurial venturing upon graduation.

Conversely, the findings from the work of Caloghirou, Protogerou, & Deligianni (2013) which focused on entrepreneurial development among students and young university graduates showed that an entrepreneurship curriculum content that does not motivate entrepreneurial actions and real life simulations of the process of entrepreneurship will negate the drive and commitment of young graduates in terms of setting up entrepreneurial ventures. In a similar work by Papadimitriou (2017) the results of the research showed that entrepreneurial curriculum contents were insignificant in influencing the commitment of business students to pursue a self-employed career which is considered adverse to the entrepreneurial development of university students. In a related research by Bilic, Prka & Vidovic (2011) the findings from the research suggest that there is a low correlation between the entrepreneurship curriculum and the entrepreneurial orientation of students at graduation. According to the authors, this may be as a result of the inability of the curriculum to stimulate entrepreneurial development in students.

A critical review of extant empirical studies on the effects of curriculum contents and entrepreneurial development of university students such as discussed above, show that studies such as Bodnar, Renee & Besterfeild-Scacre (2015) and Ebringa, Ewenwa, & Ebringa (2015) focused on critical thinking and business idea generation as components of entrepreneurial development, while similar studies such as (Caloghirou, Protogerou, & Deligianni (2013); Papadimitriou, (2017)) focused on commitment towards achievement of entrepreneurial goals at graduation as the salient component of entrepreneurial development. Therefore, it suggests that there is a paucity of research within and outside the Nigerian context, on the effects of curriculum contents on entrepreneurial development of university students with emphasis on integrating all three identified components of entrepreneurial development.
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore how the curriculum contents of an entrepreneurship programme affect the entrepreneurial development of university students in Nigeria. The overarching research questions are:

1. 1) Does the contents of an entrepreneurship curriculum influence the development of critical thinking abilities by university students?
2. 2) Are business idea generation competencies developed by university students based on the contents of an entrepreneurship curriculum?
3. 3) Does the contents of an entrepreneurship curriculum motivate university students’ commitment towards the achievement of entrepreneurial goals at graduation?

RESEARCH DESIGN

To address these questions, a two-phased, sequential, explanatory design model was used. In this descriptive research, quantitative content analysis followed by qualitative thematic analysis were used to examine the data collected through a survey and semi structured interviews conducted on entrepreneurship educators about the entrepreneurial development of university students sequel to exposure to the course content of an entrepreneurship programme. Quantitative content analysis is a technique for systematically describing written, spoken or visual communication and it provides a quantitative (numerical) description (Creswell & Clark, 2007). Hence, quantitative content analysis was used to provide numerical description for the responses of entrepreneurship educators. Thematic analysis was also well suited to this study since it also required an open analysis that does not impose a unit of analysis stemming from the semi structured interviews. As such, repetition of terms, recurrence of ideas, and forcefulness were leveraged as criteria to identify themes. Therefore, mixed methods was suited for this study because it allowed the researchers to better understand the research problem by converging both broad numeric trends from the content analysis and the detail of the thematic analysis (Creswell, 2003).

Source of Data and Research Participants

The source of these data was assessments of undergraduate students from 2014 to 2017, documented by educators based on business plan assignments which were a required assignment in every undergraduate course. As part of the assignment students who were close to graduation were required to meet with a professional from a field or position that aligned with their goals, to obtain feedback on entrepreneurial development. Forty (40) copies of a structured questionnaire and semi structured interviews were used to collect data from entrepreneurship educators from Covenant University which is the first university to begin an entrepreneurship programme in Nigeria. An average of ten (10) entrepreneurship educators is allocated to each academic year from 100 to 500 levels. Thus there are about fifty (50) entrepreneurship educators across four colleges involved in entrepreneurship teaching in the institution. Morse (2000) recommended eight to twelve participants as sufficient sample size, to allow for rich descriptions and implications of recurring patterns, especially for mixed methods where the goal is to augment the result of the quantitative research. Therefore, Twelve (12) entrepreneurship educators were interviewed across the four colleges of the university conducting three (3) interviews in each college. The interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and forty (40)
copies of questionnaire were distributed purposively to entrepreneurship educators across the four colleges of the institution. Ten (10) copies of questionnaire were distributed in each college and thirty six (36) copies were retrieved in total from the four colleges.

Procedure for Data Analysis

Content analysis was used in the first round of data analysis to develop a quantitative coding scheme. The following overarching categories of data were created based on the components of entrepreneurial development as stated in the works of Caloghirou, Protogerou, & Deligianni 2013; Gafar, Kasim, & Martin, (2013); Ebringa, Ewenwa, & Ebringa (2015); Papadimitriou (2017). 1) University students’ development of critical thinking 2) University students business idea generation competencies 3) University students commitment towards achievement of entrepreneurial goals. The recordings from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed through thematic analysis to identify and report patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was used in identifying and describing both implicit and explicit ideas within the data which are referred to as themes. Repetition of terms and recurrence of ideas were employed to generate themes. The Thematic analysis focused on entrepreneurship educators’ perceptions on the influence of the course contents of the entrepreneurship programme on students’ entrepreneurial development. Open coding was employed to develop relevant categories. The developed codes were used to represent the identified themes and the reports were structured in terms of the main themes emerging from the semi-structured interviews.

RESULTS

Quantitative Findings Based on Content Analysis

The content analysis revealed that Thirty (30) participants (83%) opined that most students develop critical thinking abilities based on the narratives in the business plan assignments. This may imply that most entrepreneurship students are able to come up with business solutions as regards improving or creating new business processes or products as a result of the course contents of the entrepreneurship programme. Thirty two (32) participants (89%) affirmed that majority of the students are not able to develop business idea generation competencies. This opinion was based on the fact that the educators claimed that many innovative ideas are contained in the business plan assignments submitted by the students. Thirty three (33) participants (92%) of the participants affirmed that most students do not develop commitment for the achievement of their entrepreneurial goals and aspirations. This result suggests that the entrepreneurship curriculum may be weak in stimulating a strong drive and commitment in students for the pursuit of a career in entrepreneurship at graduation.

Qualitative Findings Based on Thematic Analysis

Three Themes associated with entrepreneurship course contents and entrepreneurial developments of students are discussed in the following sections.
Entrepreneurship Curriculum Contents and Development of Critical Thinking Abilities

Majority of the entrepreneurship educators interviewed were of the opinion that the content of the entrepreneurship curriculum contains aspects that possibly informs students’ development of critical thinking abilities. However, the educators stressed that the practical activities especially in the classrooms should involve brain storming and problem solving sessions using real life situations. The educators were also of the opinion that less emphasis on such practical activities may impede the development of critical thinking abilities. Excerpts from the respondents are as follows:

1. “The Curriculum covers most aspects of a good entrepreneurship programme and so many students have developed relevant entrepreneurial skills and abilities. There are practical aspects that engage students in critical thinking sessions especially during class lectures. This propels them to be more creative (Participant 4).

2. “The curriculum in place is a good one and it contains vital aspects that can motivate creative thinking and development of critical thinking abilities. There should be more emphasis on real world problem solving sessions and activities (Participant 10).

3. “The curriculum has improved over time and students are beginning to take development of critical thinking skills seriously however, it can be improved considerably. (Participant 8)

4. Furthermore, in the following description of the design of entrepreneurship curriculum in Nigerian universities a participant was of the opinion that practical activities in every programme/course in the institution should be tailored towards the entrepreneurial need of the sectors related to students’ field of study. This may motivate the development of critical thinking abilities considering that students would possess technical knowledge and also be conversant with trends in their field of study.

5. “I believe the practical entrepreneurial activities in the institution should be tailored towards the entrepreneurial need of the sectors related to students’ field of study this will enhance the critical thinking abilities of students (Participant 5)

Entrepreneurship Curriculum Contents and Business idea development Competencies

Majority of the participants believe that the course contents of the entrepreneurship programme have direct implications for business idea development competencies by students. Most participants were of the opinion that students develop the abilities to generate viable business ideas and other similar competencies.

1. “There are many topics in the curriculum that motivates the development of entrepreneurial competencies by students. Topics such as idea generation, business plan writing and similar topics enhance the entrepreneurial idea development potentials of students”

2. Well what I can say is that students develop idea generation skills and a lot of skills that are necessary for an entrepreneur.

3. A wide range of competencies are developed as a result of students’ exposure to the entrepreneurship course content. For instance students are able to come up with viable business ideas, write business plans, work as a team, innovate and many other such competencies.

Entrepreneurship Curriculum Contents and Students’ Motivation for Achievement of Entrepreneurial Goals and Aspirations at Graduation

Most participants observed that majority of the students do not have a strong commitment and drive to engage in entrepreneurship after graduation. There are evidences and indications that most students are more favourably disposed to securing paid employment after graduation which is perceived by students as a more reliable option. Hence, majority of the
participants opined that participation in the entrepreneurship course hardly motivates a common drive in students for engagement in an entrepreneurial career at graduation.

1. “Most entrepreneurship students have developed interest in engaging in entrepreneurial activities based on the information and knowledge acquired from the entrepreneurship course. However, most students still opt for paid employments at graduation. Only a few end up running their own businesses”.
2. “The entrepreneurship course has influenced students in many ways. Mainly, understanding of business and entrepreneurship has been broadened as a result of participation in the entrepreneurship programme” but I think only few students develop enough confidence and commitment to become entrepreneurs at graduation.
3. “The contents of the curriculum does not seem to motivate a common entrepreneurial goal amongst students because many only feel compelled to engage in the activities of the course”

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

**RQ1) Does the contents of an entrepreneurship curriculum influence the development of critical thinking abilities by university students?**

Results from the analysis based on **RQ1** showed that most students in the selected university are able to develop creative business idea generation competencies. This result is in line with the study of Mahajar & Yunus (2012) which showed that university entrepreneurship curriculum contents significantly impacts on students’ inclination towards development of critical thinking competencies. The result also aligns with the study of Ebringa, Ewenwa, & Ebringa (2015) suggesting that engagement of university students in practical and collaborative entrepreneurial extra curricula activities and mentoring by experienced entrepreneurial minded academic equips students with critical thinking abilities.

**RQ2) Are business idea generation competencies developed by university students based on the contents of an entrepreneurship curriculum?**

The results from the analysis based on **RQ2** revealed that the course contents of the entrepreneurship programme in the institution have direct implications for business idea development competencies by students. This supports study of Bodnar Renee & Besterfeld-Scacre (2015) which showed that provisions in entrepreneurship curriculum content have implications for entrepreneurial development of university students mainly by motivating critical thinking abilities and business idea generation competencies in students. This also validates the study of Gafar Kasim & martin (2013) which showed that entrepreneurship curriculum in the tertiary institutions affects entrepreneurial development of students by motivating undergraduates to develop innovative business ideas.

**RQ3) Does the contents of an entrepreneurship curriculum motivate university students’ commitment towards the achievement of entrepreneurial goals at graduation?**

The results of analysis based on **RQ3** showed that most students are not able develop the confidence, commitment and drive for the achievement of entrepreneurial goals and aspirations at graduation. This may imply that even though the curriculum motivate students to develop relevant entrepreneurial abilities and competencies, yet they do not feel confident about succeeding with their own entrepreneurial ventures at graduation This result validates the study of Bilic, Prka & Vidovic (2011) which revealed that there is a low correlation between the
entrepreneurship curriculum and the entrepreneurial orientation of university students at graduation. This also confirms the study of Caloghirou, Protoperou, & Deligianni (2013) which showed that an entrepreneurship curriculum content that does not motivate entrepreneurial actions and real life simulations of the process of entrepreneurship will negate the drive and commitment of young graduates in terms of setting up entrepreneurial ventures. The result also aligns with a similar work by Papadimitriou (2017) suggesting that university entrepreneurship curriculum contents were insignificant in influencing the commitment to pursue a self-employed career which is considered adverse to the entrepreneurial development of university students.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Entrepreneurship curricula in Nigerian universities should motivate the development of entrepreneurial mindset and action. Only the engagement of real life situations in practical activities can motivate the development of the drive and commitment necessary to motivate students to engage in entrepreneurship at graduation. This is very salient to the entrepreneurial development of university students in especially in Nigeria.

Therefore, Entrepreneurship curricula in Nigerian universities should contain an extensive coverage on critical thinking and problem solving activities. This is important because critical thinking and problem solving skills are very salient to entrepreneurial success and development. It is recommended that these skill building activities should be tailored towards students’ course of study and interest. This will go a long way to enhance students’ abilities to discover entrepreneurial opportunities related to their field of study.

Entrepreneurship curricula in Nigerian universities should also contain an extensive coverage of practical brain storming activities geared towards the development of business idea generation competencies by students. Brain storming activities such as rapid ideation, reverse brain storming, role play brainstorming, SWOT analysis and mind mapping should be contained in entrepreneurship curricula to motivate and build upon the business idea generation competencies of university students.

There is a need to ensure that entrepreneurship curriculum contents in Nigerian universities motivate entrepreneurial actions and real life simulations of the process of entrepreneurship. Course activities such as submission of business plans as a requirement for graduation similar to dissertations, and business start-ups as a graded component of the entrepreneurship programme will stimulate the drive and commitment of young graduates in terms of setting up entrepreneurial ventures.

REFERENCES


