

PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP CURRICULUM CONTENTS AND OPENMINDEDNESS: IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS IDEA GENERATION OF NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study was to ascertain the effects of entrepreneurship curriculum contents on students' critical thinking and generate business ideas. This study focused on the perceptions of Nigerian university students. Emphasis was laid on the first four universities in Nigeria to offer a B.Sc./B.Tech degree programme in entrepreneurship. Consequently this study involved students and entrepreneurship educators at Federal University of Technology Akure, Ondo state, Federal University of Agriculture Abeokuta Ogun state, Joseph Ayo Babalola University Osun state and Lead City University Ibadan, Oyo state. The study adopted quantitative approach with a descriptive research design to establish trends related to the objective of the study. Survey was used as quantitative research method. The population of this study included all students in the selected universities. Multi-stage sampling technique was employed which included stratified sampling and simple random sampling. Data was analysed with the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Hierarchical multiple regression was used as statistical tool of analysis to show the incremental contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable. The findings of the study showed that the design of an entrepreneurship curriculum can motivate critical thinking abilities in students to generate creative business ideas. Thus it was recommended that practical activities such as brain storming, mind mapping and similar activities can be used to stimulate idea generation potentials in entrepreneurship students.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship Education, Entrepreneurship Curriculum Contents, Open-Mindedness, Business Idea Generation.

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship education in universities is aimed at inculcating entrepreneurial skills and attitudes in students to motivate entrepreneurial intentions or increased considerations of entrepreneurship as a career by graduates (Middleton, 2010). Though research on the impact of entrepreneurship education in the western world and particularly in Nigeria suggests a positive influence on entrepreneurial intentions of university students, however the rising rate of graduate

unemployment and aspirations for white collar jobs in Nigeria indicate a contrary effect of the programme on students' entrepreneurial intentions (Okorie & Adali, 2013). Entrepreneurship education is a purposeful action which should stimulate participants' mindset for generating innovative and creative business ideas (Sadeghi, Mohammadi, Nosrati & Malekian, 2013). Gafar, Kasim and Martin (2013) in their presentation of Hynes' process model of entrepreneurship education stressed the significance of idea generation in the course content and process nature of entrepreneurship education based on the assertion that idea development is a major determinant of successful entrepreneurial endeavour and an expression of entrepreneurial intentions. It is important to state that researchers such as Adebayo and Kolawole (2013), Dirk Benson and Bruce (2013) as well as Papadimitriou (2015) have advocated a refocus of entrepreneurship curriculum content in universities to bridge the gap between theory and practice with particular emphasis on entrepreneurial intentions. However, there is a need to situate the assessment of the effects of the curriculum contents on student entrepreneurial intention in a more specific perspective especially in the Nigerian university context. It becomes imperative to ascertain whether entrepreneurship curriculum contents stimulate open-mindedness of undergraduates to generate business ideas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Entrepreneurship Education

A school of thought believes that entrepreneurs are born and not made. This suggests that entrepreneurs are individuals with peculiar genes who emerge as a consequence of genetic inheritance. However this myth has been demystified particularly because various studies have established the premise that every individual has the potential to become an entrepreneur especially through the process of education (Gelard & Saleh, 2011). It is important to state that entrepreneurship as a career offer individuals the opportunity to be financially independent, as well as enhance the achievement of professional and personal goals (Odeh & Okoye, 2014). The process of entrepreneurship can be very challenging in that it is characterized by a long term systematic process which involves identification of opportunities, development of business model, putting together a venture team, fund raising, financial management, as well as leading and motivating employees (Kuratko & Hodgetts, 2005). Therefore the acquisition relevant knowledge, skill and expertise as regards the process of entrepreneurship become imperative for successful business startups (Clouse, 1990). Entrepreneurship education describes the scope of lectures, curricular or programmes that attempt to provide students with the necessary entrepreneurial competencies, knowledge and skills geared towards the pursuit of a career in entrepreneurship; Ooi, Selvarajah & Meyer, 2011). It also refers to the conscious effort of an educator targeted at inculcating entrepreneurial skills in learners (Ekpoh & Edet, 2011). Fayolle Kryo and Ulijn (2006) in their presentation defined entrepreneurship education as any pedagogical programme associated with inculcating entrepreneurial attitudes and skills as well as personal qualities in learners which suggests that the goal of entrepreneurship education is not exclusively hinged on the immediate creation of new businesses but also the development of attributes and skills salient to entrepreneurial dispositions and goals.

Most definitions of entrepreneurship education agree that one of the main goals should be inculcating entrepreneurship skills in learners which should culminate in eventual business start-ups, however two key words closely associated with education as a concept is information

and skill hence a comprehensive definition of entrepreneurship education should incorporate information and skill as outcomes of the process. Therefore this study will adopt the definition of entrepreneurship education presented by Sciascia and Poli (2004) which describes entrepreneurship education as the structured formal communication of entrepreneurship competencies which consists of skills and mental awareness employed by individuals in the process of establishment of growth oriented business start-ups. This definition indicates that entrepreneurship education provides individuals with relevant skills as well as information required for successful venture creation.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP CURRICULUM

Entrepreneurship education curriculum is a dynamic, ever changing series of planned learning experiences related to entrepreneurial development of learners (Gafar, Kasim & Martin, 2013). An entrepreneurship education curriculum could be regarded as everything learners experience in school related to the development of entrepreneurial skills and capabilities (OECD, 2010). An entrepreneurship curriculum is a mechanism employed for Entrepreneurial culture reproduction in a structured way. It should also lay emphasis on creative and critical independent thinking in the context of entrepreneurship development. Generally a good description of an entrepreneurship curriculum is that it should involve a reconstruction of entrepreneurial related knowledge and experiences that enables the learner to develop in exercising intelligent control of subsequent related knowledge and experiences.

An entrepreneurial curriculum contain information on how students can identify and shape opportunities, assess business concepts, develop operational plans, fund and launch ventures, grow new enterprises and case studies which should be discussed in the classroom to provide students with another venue for examining entrepreneurial strategies and learning about the successes and failures of new ventures (Kourilsky, 1995; Gafar, Kasim & Martin, 2013). Entrepreneurship and career education have some common variables that make them to be institutional strategies aimed at improving educational outcomes by relating teaching and learning activities to the concepts of self-development (Bilic, Prka and Vidovic 2011). Entrepreneurial curriculum contains information on how students can identify and shape opportunities, assess business concepts, develop operational plans, fund and launch ventures, grow new enterprises and case studies which should be discussed in the classroom to provide students with another venue for examining entrepreneurial strategies and learning about the successes and failures of new ventures (Kourilsky, 1995; OECD, 2010).

Open-mindedness/Critical Thinking

Open mindedness connotes the readiness of an individual to critically assess and evaluate his or her learning disposition and acceptance of new ideas particularly with the fast changing trends in technologies (Verona, 1999; Porac & Thomas, 1990; Dirk, Benson, and Bruce 2013). Past knowledge learnt may also be instructive and beneficial if individuals are favourably disposed to questioning these stocks of knowledge with open mindedness geared towards updating existing knowledge base (Sinkula, 1994; Moses, Olokundun, Akinbode, Agboola and Inelo, 2016). Critical thinking is closely linked to the concept of unlearning through which individuals consciously and proactively question older routines and status-quo as well as assertions and individual beliefs (Sinkula & Baker, 1997; Sarasvathy, 2008). This motivates individuals to dismiss outdated knowledge replacing them with novel and creative ones.

Therefore open mindedness may facilitate students' development of new business ideas or discovery of novel business opportunities as a consequence of exposure to challenging models of entrepreneurship programmes (Probst & Buchel, 1997; Perin, Sampaio, Barcellos and Kugler 2010). This suggests that aspects of entrepreneurship education may stimulate critical thinking in participants which may translate into intentions for an entrepreneurship career.

BUSINESS IDEA GENERATION

Every business venture starts with a business idea, a business idea is one that is feasible and viable that can be translated into a venture (Pam, 2013). From an entrepreneurship point of view idea generation involves either the discovery of a business idea or the development of a feasible business concept over a period of time (Long, 2010). It is worthy to note that the quality of information an entrepreneur gets increases the chances of generating an idea which involves the creative process of creating, developing and communicating new ideas in business. Generally, many techniques for idea generation relevant to the context of entrepreneurship education have been proposed and most techniques are based on the ideology that one may lose many creative ideas by evaluating them prematurely. Thus, separation of the creation of ideas from their evaluation is a crucial aspect. Primarily the fundamental rules of creative thinking includes having a positive outlook, building upon group ideas, coming up with as many ideas as possible; and consistent review of idea (Morais, 2001). In general, it is believed that idea generation methods and approaches are very important source of motivation for individuals' especially aspiring entrepreneurs. These approaches can be categorised into three basic classifications: free association, structured relationships and group techniques (Marakas, 1999; Pam, 2013). In the category of structured relationship techniques which is particularly relevant to entrepreneurship education programmes, the focus is on the generation of new ideas through forced combinations of different ideas or concepts to produce new and novel ideas (Arenius & Declerq, 2005). However, the most widely used techniques relevant to entrepreneurship education involve groups and employment of variations of the brainstorming theme.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP CURRICULUM, OPEN MINDEDNESS AND IDEA GENERATION

As the literature on entrepreneurship education evolves, there has been a particular focus on what should be the content of the offered programmes particularly because researchers have argued that there is a fundamental disparity between entrepreneurship and business management (Bruyat & Julien, 2001). Past studies associated with the theoretical foundation for the emergence of entrepreneurship as an independent academic discipline have argued in favour of a distinction between the curricula of entrepreneurship education programmes and that of the traditional or conventional management education programmes (Vesper and McMullan, 1988; Plaschka & Welsh, 1990; Solomon, 2007). McMullan and Long (1987) argued that entrepreneurship education programmes should motivate critical thinking in order to achieve teaching goals such as business idea generation. Vesper and McMullan (1988) in support of skill building courses argued that the focus of these courses should feature important distinctions between entrepreneurship education programmes and traditional management programmes such as the development of a mindset to generate business ideas, and carry out effective business forecast.

Plaschka and Welsh (1990) in their argument in support of the distinction between entrepreneurship education and traditional management programmes postulated that entrepreneurship programmes should be targeted at creative thinking as well as theory-based practical applications to solving problems. Solomon (2007) in a review of entrepreneurship education in United States of America suggested that the curriculum contents should stimulate an entrepreneurial mindset geared towards multiple venture plans and business ideas generation. Generally research suggests that an effective entrepreneurship education programme particularly in the Nigerian university context must employ curricula that stimulate open mindedness and critical thinking especially with entrepreneurial actions such as business idea generation in order to learn value creation in real life ventures in preparation for their own entrepreneurial endeavors (Steinfioff & Durges, 1993). This can help to stimulate an entrepreneurial mindset in Nigerian undergraduates geared towards viable business idea generation.

Upon this premise the researchers postulated the following hypothesis in null form;

H01: Entrepreneurship curriculum contents do not stimulate critical thinking and business idea generation.

METHODOLOGY

The data for this study was collected from university students of four selected institutions in Nigeria offering a degree programme in entrepreneurship. The selected universities are Joseph Ayo Babalola in Osun State, Federal University of Agriculture in Abeokuta Ogun State, Federal University of Technology Akure Ondo State and Lead City University Ibadan Oyo State. This study adopted descriptive cross sectional survey research design in which the research questionnaire was administered to participants based on multi-stage sampling technique which involved purposive sampling, stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques. The first stage involved purposive sampling which was used to select the universities used for this study. The second stage involved stratified sampling technique which was used to categorise the study population (undergraduate students) in the four selected universities into different academic years. Hence all students in these universities regardless of their course of study were grouped into five according to their academic year of study. This enhanced the identification of sub-groups within the study population and also created a sample which adequately represented these sub-groups (Yount, 2006). The last stage involved simple random sampling which was carried out firstly by assigning a consecutive number from 1 to the population number for each selected university, secondly from the list of students in each academic year in the selected universities a sample was drawn using random number tables. The sample size for this study was determined based on Godden (2004), which recommended a formula where the study population is greater than fifty thousand respondents. The formula according to Godden (2004) is stated as follows:

$$SS = \frac{Z^2 \times p(1-p)}{C^2}$$

Where:

SS=Sample Size for infinite population

Z=Z value (e.g. 1.96 for 95% confidence level)

P=Population proportion (expressed as decimal) (assumed to be 0.5 (50%))

C=Confidence interval at 0.04

Therefore, Sample size= $\frac{3.8416 \times 0.5 \times 0.5}{0.0016}$

Sample size=600

Therefore a sample size of 600 students was used to represent the study population as computed above. In developing the survey questionnaire instrument, questions were adapted from existing literature that relate to the study. The validity and reliability of the research instruments was analyzed using content validity and Cronbach Alpha Reliability Procedure respectively. Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis was used in validating the hypothesis postulated in the study using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY PROCEDURES

To ensure content validity experts on the subject matter of this study were provided with access to the measurement tool in order to provide feedback on the effectiveness of each question in measuring the constructs (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2002). Informed decisions were made based on their feedbacks. The test to determine the internal consistency of the research instrument was conducted on the retrieved questionnaire with the aid of the Cronbach Alpha Reliability procedure.

RELIABILITY STATISTICS	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
0.856	40

Source: Field work, (2016)

The result indicated that the instrument had a good internal consistency based on the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient value reported at 0.856 (Table 1).

Hypotheses Testing and Results

H₀₁ Entrepreneurship curriculum contents have no effect on students' open-mindedness to generate entrepreneurial ideas.

Hierarchical Multiple Regression

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	0.250 ^a	0.063	0.061	0.74646	0.063	37.587	1	563	0.000
2	0.378 ^b	0.143	0.140	0.71437	0.080	52.706	1	562	0.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), content									
b. Predictors: (Constant), content, open-mindedness									

Source: Field Survey Result (2016)

This study revealed in model 1 (Table 2) above that entrepreneurship curriculum contents has effect on business idea generation at $r=0.250$. R-Square is the proportion of variance of the dependent variable which can be predicted by the independent variable. This value indicated that there is a variance of 6.3% between entrepreneurship curriculum contents and business idea generation. The second model was to ascertain the mediating role of open mindedness of students. The relationships between entrepreneurship curriculum content, open mindedness of the students and business idea generation was also established at $r=0.378$ while the R-Square changed to 0.143.

The significance of the F-change was assessed and it was significant (0.0001).

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20.943	1	20.943	37.587	0.000 ^a
	Residual	313.703	563	0.557		
	Total	334.646	564			
2	Regression	47.841	2	23.920	46.873	0.000 ^b
	Residual	286.805	562	0.510		
	Total	334.646	564			
a. Predictors: (Constant), content						
b. Predictors: (Constant), content, openm						
c. Dependent Variable: ideagen						
Source: Field Survey Result (2016)						

The Table 3 has the results of the two models. The first model showed the effect of entrepreneurship curriculum content on generation of business ideas as expression of entrepreneurial intentions. The F-value is the Mean Square Regression (20.943) divided by the Mean Square Residual (0.557), yielding $F=37.587$. From the results, the model 1 in this table is statistically significant ($Sig=0.000$). The second model is about the effect of both entrepreneurship curriculum content and open mindedness of the students on entrepreneurial intention of the students' to generate business ideas. The F-value is the Mean Square Regression (23.920) divided by the Mean Square Residual (0.150), yielding $F=46.873$ at acceptable significant level of .0001. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected while alternate hypothesis is therefore accepted.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Correlations			Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Zero-order	Partial	Part	Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	2.731	0.194		14.055	0.000					
	Content	0.287	0.047	0.250	6.131	0.000	0.250	0.250	0.250	1.000	1.000
2	(Constant)	1.685	0.235		7.164	0.000					
	Content	0.233	0.045	0.203	5.133	0.000	0.250	0.212	0.200	0.973	1.027
	Openm	0.323	0.044	0.287	7.260	0.000	0.321	0.293	0.284	0.973	1.027

Based on the results in model 2, the Table 4 revealed the contributions of entrepreneurship curriculum content and open mindedness of the students to generate business ideas as expression of entrepreneurial intentions and their levels of significance (Content; $\beta=0.233$; $t=5.133$; $p<0.0001$, openm; $\beta=0.323$; $t=7.260$; $p<0.0001$).

DECISION

The significance levels of the variables are less than 0.05 and the F change (52.706) is high and it is significant (0.0001). Based on the results revealed above it was justified that the alternate hypothesis should be accepted while the null hypothesis should be rejected. It can therefore be concluded that entrepreneurship curriculum contents have significant effects on students critical thinking and generation of business ideas.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Findings from the hypothesis revealed that entrepreneurship curriculum contents have a high significant effect on students' open-mindedness to generate business ideas as expression of entrepreneurial intentions. The implication of this finding is that the design of the curriculum of an entrepreneurship programme largely affects the extent to which entrepreneurship students develop critical thinking abilities which facilitates students' receptiveness to novel and creative business ideas. The result of this hypothesis is in consonance with the findings of Bilic Prka and Vidovic (2011), who suggested that the design of an entrepreneurship curriculum may stimulate

the development of entrepreneurial ideas and the practice of entrepreneurship. This also corroborates the work of Bodnar, Renee and Besterfeild-Scacre (2015), who asserted that the provision of curricular content on idea generation has implications for the development of entrepreneurial mindset and skills of learners. It is also in line with the findings of Kasim and Martin (2013) which showed that The Business Team Project Partnership Curriculum Program (BT-PPP) BT-PPP was suitable for motivating entrepreneurial idea generation and similar entrepreneurial learning outcomes. This study has shown that the design of the curriculum of entrepreneurship programme in the selected Nigerian Universities largely motivates entrepreneurship students to develop open-mindedness and critical thinking abilities which enhance the development of novel and creative business ideas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Entrepreneurship education can only be effectively taught using practical approaches; hence the design of entrepreneurship curriculum in Nigerian universities should involve activities such as brainstorming, mind mapping, role playing, questioning assumptions and similar activities. This will stimulate open-mindedness and critical thinking abilities of students towards expression of behavioural outcomes such as business idea generation. This may reinforce the likelihood of students' pursuit of an entrepreneurship career after graduation.

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