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THE ROLE OF ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS IN ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF SELECTED UNIVERSITIES IN ABIA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between entrepreneurial skills and academic performance among the students in tertiary institution. Two tertiary institutions in Abia state were used for the study. A sample of 350 students (male and female) was randomly drawn from the two schools. Data were collected using Tanyis' (1991) students adjustment inventory (SAI), the annual examination report of the respondents and a researcher-developed questionnaire. Statistical analysis of data was done by application of mean, standard deviation, t-test and correlation statistics. The result indicated that significant relationship exists between entrepreneurial skills and academic achievement of students and that gender does not significantly influence academic behavior among the students. It was also found that training students on essential and valuable entrepreneurial skills could improve moral education among the students in the tertiary institution. Based on this finding, the researchers recommended the imparting of the knowledge of entrepreneurial skills to students of tertiary institutions and academic staff for it benefits.
Keywords: Entrepreneurship, tertiary institution, achievement, academic achievement.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation and risk taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. This supports everyone in day-to-day life at home and in society, makes employees more aware of the context of their work and better able to seize opportunities, and provides a foundation for entrepreneurs establishing a social or commercial activity.

Entrepreneurship has become a word of the day. Policymakers, economists, academics and even university students are talking about it. Seminars, conferences and workshops are being organised every year across the world which emphasise the importance of entrepreneurship to the economy of a country, society as well as individual development (Béchard and Toulouse (1998); Schaper and Volery (2004); Matlay and Westhead 2005).

Entrepreneurship can be regarded as an "employment opportunity", helping people to get self-employed. With regard to Albanian university graduates, this study that they have strong entrepreneurial awareness and desire. Entrepreneurship is fundamental to self-reliance, the more self-reliant a person becomes, the better the quality of his/her life, family, community and society at large. Entrepreneurship enables human beings to get the most out of life experiences and resources. Entrepreneurship produces actionable ideas, new concepts, new designs and new opportunities while innovation adds values to the new products. According to Akinboye (2003), without entrepreneurial skill, a person is not able to access the fullness of information and resources available but is locked up in old habits, structures, patterns, concepts and perceptions. This is why entrepreneurship, generative perception, constructive and design thinking plus innovation should form the basis of any education for sustainable development. Entrepreneurship is the confluence of intellectual activity, knowledge, motivation, thinking styles, personality and environment.

Entrepreneurship should be related to intellectual activity and knowledge. The problem with our educational system is that students are not taught in a way that enhances entrepreneurial thinking and the assessment procedures do not reward entrepreneurship. This is a serious challenge to our educational system especially the tertiary education that should encourage exposure to technical skills which can be enhanced through entrepreneurial thinking.

Entrepreneurship is a basic tool for progress in any society or community. It is so important that any area of development must not lose sight of it. The conditions of modern day living characterized by complexity and interdependence, technological and communication advances, as well as rising expectations call for increased entrepreneurship (Olatoye & Oyundoyin, 2007). As the society becomes more complex, there is a gradual increase in the awareness that yesterday's methods do not effectively solve contemporary problems of the society (Akinboye, 1985). This is why innovation and entrepreneurial skill are needed in nearly all the facets of the society.

For the same level of education, it seems student entrepreneurial capacity varies from country to country. For example, Palaniappan (2009) compared entrepreneurial levels of Malaysian and American students. He reported that American students are significantly superior to their Malaysian counterparts in general entrepreneurship as well as in its components, namely fluency, flexibility, originality and elaboration. However, there was no significant relationship between entrepreneurship and academic achievement. There was also no significant difference in academic achievement of Malaysian and American students.

The important point here is that a group of more creative students may not necessarily be academically better than a group of less creative students. In other words, creativity is not necessarily a significant predictor of academic achievement.

In Nigeria, Oyundoyin and Olatoye (2007) reported that there was no difference between male and female students on general entrepreneurial tests.

There was also no significant difference between male and female students on each component of entrepreneurship namely fluency, originality, flexibility and creativity motivation. They recommended that neither men nor women should be discriminated against in tasks that require demonstration of entrepreneurial skills. It is clear from literature that studies which investigated gender differences in entrepreneurial skills, seem to be characterized by contradictory results.

Some of the findings showed male superiority over females (Torrance, 1981); some female superiority over males (Orieux&Yewchuk, 1990); yet others did not indicate any difference between male and female respondents (Tegano& Moran, 1989). Some psychologists opined that

entrepreneurial skill is commonly found more among males than females due to sex role differences emphasized in the society (Howard, 1995).

In addition, Naderi*et al* (2008) found there was no gender difference on entrepreneurship as the whole. However, the findings revealed gender differences in subscales scores. According to this result, females scored higher than males in the initiative factor, while males scored higher than females in the environmental sensitivity factor. There is also no significant difference between male and female student academic achievement. Naderi, Abdullah, Tengku-Aizan, Sharir and Kumar (2009) reported that neither intelligence nor entrepreneurial skill is a significant predictor of academic achievement among undergraduate students in Iran using CGPA scores as measures of student achievement. Gender difference in academic achievement seems to vary depending on the school subject or course being considered. For example, Deary*et al* (2007) found that there was gender difference in educational attainment. Girls performed better than boys on overall academics subjects (courses). There was also significant gender difference in all academic subjects (courses) scores, except physics; girls performed better in every topic except physics. Olatoye (2008) reported there is no significant difference between male and female achievement in science. Tamir (1990) reported there is no significance difference between male and female achievement in biology and chemistry but reported a significant difference in physics (boys scoring higher).

Gender has remained a burning issue and has also remained relevant in education because it has been linked to achievement and participation in certain professions (Sotonade, 2004). Certain cultures restrict particular gender to certain professions like farming, engineering and trading (Erinosho, 1997; Olatoye & Afuwape, 2004). Therefore, considering gender as in any educational study can yield useful practical information.

Entrepreneurship is the act or ability to create something new through imaginative skills. It is a mental process involving the generation of new ideas. Entrepreneurship is finding concepts or association between existing and new concepts or rearranging what is known in order to find out what is not known. The entrepreneurial skill takes place in the thought. Entrepreneurial thinking has two aspects: Divergent Thinking (intellectual ability to think of many original, diverse and elaborate thought) and Convergent Thinking (intellectual ability to logically evaluate critique and choose the best ideas from a selection of ideas). It was initially felt that only gifted or special people could be skillful. Research has proved that only certain attributes are required to be skillful (Oyundoyin&Olatoye, 2007). A creative person requires passion and commitment; fresh way of looking at things; an understanding of people and an entrepreneurial willingness to take risk and work hard, ability to convince people that the new idea is good or better. Entrepreneurship is fostered or inhibited by certain environmental pressures.

In this era when higher education across the world is striving to produce graduates that will be self-reliant, studying business administration offers students opportunity to develop skills, abilities and understanding to enter, perform and progress in particular business occupations. Business administration prepares students for job competence, occupational intelligence and work adjustment. Unlinfun (1986), Aina (1991) and Adeola (2006) opined that skills acquired through business education can lead to individual's economic survival and self-employment. Student exposure to business skills according to Malbary (1999) is to create a pool of men and women of character and competence, people who are balanced in their physical, emotional and spiritual well-being and who will be effective in the design and implementation of national development strategies. A good business administrator therefore should be emotionally intelligent, creative and innovative.

A person's skillfulness is fostered when appropriate environment is present. Entrepreneurial activities lead to innovation. While entrepreneurship is the art of producing new ideas, approach or action, innovation is the process of both generating and applying such creative ideas and converting them into novel, useful and viable products, services and business practices. It has also been reported that highly skillful persons are not necessarily high academic achievers (Palaniappan, 2009). However, most of the research findings on creativity continue to come from advanced countries. Against this backdrop, this study investigated the relationship between students' entrepreneurial skill and Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA) scores of students in selected tertiary institution in Abia States, Southeast of Nigeria.

Research Questions

The following questions were generated to guide the study:

1. What is the contribution of entrepreneurial skill of the university students to their academic achievement?
2. What is the relationship between male and female student (i) entrepreneurial skill and (ii) academic achievement?

Research Hypothesis

1. Is there any significant difference between entrepreneurship and academic achievement among the selected tertiary institutions?

Methodology

In the study, the independent variable (entrepreneurial skill of students) and the dependent variable (academic achievement) have already occurred.

We only attempt to identify and compare the variables (without manipulating them) for the purpose of making inferences about their relationship.

Therefore Ex-post-facto research design was adopted to find out and describe the extent to which the level of entrepreneurship influenced the level of academic achievement of Degree business administration students of institutions in the South East of Nigeria. Many scholars agreed that Ex-post-facto design is the best design for collecting data on variables that have already occurred.

Target Population, Sample and Sampling Procedures

The target population for this study consists of all the current final year, students of Business Administration and entrepreneurial students of Abia State University, Uturu (ABSU) and Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAU), Nigeria. The sample for the study was three hundred and fifty (350) final year students on a Business Administration (degree) programme and students studying entrepreneurship programme in both institutions in the Southeast of Nigeria. The universities were selected, using purposive technique; one is state while other is federal university respectively. The universities selected are as shown in table 1.

However, simple random sampling technique was used to select 200 final year degree students in MOUAU and 150 final year degree students in ABSU both for business administration and related entrepreneurial studies of the selected universities.

Instrumentation

The under listed two instruments were used for collecting data for this study:

1. Student Cumulative Grade Point (CGPA) Information Format (SCIF) – attached as appendix I
2. Nicolas Holt Creativity Test (NHCT) – attached as appendix II

3. The SCIF was designed by the researcher to collect data about the CGPA, matriculation number, school and gender of students.

The CGPA was used as a measure for academic success of the students. NHCT is a twenty-nine (29)-item instrument, developed to test the level of entrepreneurial skill of persons in the areas of fluency, originality, flexibility and elaboration of traits, among others.

The validity of the instruments was sought by distributing the draft copies of the questionnaires (NHCT) to experts in item construction for their criticism and suggestions through appendix II. The experts' comments/suggestions were incorporated into the final draft of the instruments.

Data Collection Procedure

The permission of the Heads of department of the departments of the selected universities to use the students were sought and obtained. The assistance of the class coordinators and, in some cases, the H.O.D, were obtained in addressing the students to elicit their cooperation and in administering the instruments, randomly selected students in each of the institutions was arranged for the administration of the NHCT questionnaire. This took place just before their scheduled regular classes with the consent of the affected lecturers. The questionnaires were designed such that it should not last for more than twenty minutes each for students at that level of education to complete. The researchers ensured that either the Head of department or the Class Coordinator was physically present with them at the time of administration of the questionnaires. The respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and the importance of their role. They were given opportunity to clarify necessary issues. These were done with a view to enhance response rate and reduce anxiety and subjectivity, which may interfere with the results of the study.

Data on the students CGPA were collected from the business administration departments of the Institutions, using the SCIF format, described above. The rate of return of questionnaires was 100%. In other words, all the questionnaires were completed and returned. However, the CGPA of 10 out of 350 respondents could not be found. Data analysis was therefore based on 340 students.

NHCT questionnaire was designed and scored on a 5-point Likert format type continuum scale ranging from "1" to "5":

- "1" represents "not so true of me" as we assume that everyone is emotionally intelligent and skillful in one-way or the other.
- "3" represents "averagely true of me" and a standard (average) for determining scores that are a below or above average. (i.e. low or high in the variable being measured).
- "5" represents fully represents me; in that order.

CGPA data collected through SCIF was classified to show different levels of academic achievement; ranging from 5.00, representing Distinction, to less than 1, representing very poor. This is the grading system approved by the National Universities Commission (NUC) that regulates academic standards in all the two institutions used.

The scores of the students on the two variables were combined and compared to show the overall pattern as well as pattern by schools and by sex of respondents.

Data analysis

Data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Student t-test was used to answer research questions 1 and 2 while Pearson Product-Moment Correlation was used to answer the research hypothesis. All the research questions and hypothesis generated for this study were answered at 0.05 alpha level using a two-tailed test.

Presentation of Results

The mean age is 24, the range is 15-35, and standard deviation is 5.2. All the selected Universities are in urban centres. One hundred and forty seven (147) students are from state-owned universities while the other one hundred and ninety three (193) students are from the Federal university, 184 are males while 156 are females.

Research Question 1: What is the contribution of entrepreneurial skill of the university students on their academic achievement?

There is negative insignificant relationship between entrepreneurial skill and students' CGPA scores ($r = -0.006$, $p>0.05$), though in a very insignificant magnitude, the higher the level of entrepreneurial skills, the lower the CGPA scores. The negative relationship suggests that some very skillful students may not be high academic achievers (See table 2).

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between male and female student (i) entrepreneurial skill and (ii) academic achievement?

Table 4 shows that entrepreneurial skill does not significantly predict the academic achievement of students. In fact, entrepreneurship accounts for no variance (0%) in academic achievement (R Square=0.000, $p > 0.05$). Thus, entrepreneurial skill has nothing to do with universities student achievement, as measured by the CGPA scores.

Research Hypothesis: Is there any significant difference between entrepreneurship and academic achievement among the selected tertiary institutions?

Table 3 & 4 shows that there is no significant difference between male and female student entrepreneurial skill and academic achievement. Thus males and female students have the same level of skillfulness and academic achievement. Entrepreneurial skill and academic achievement among university students are not sensitive to gender.

Discussion of Findings

Entrepreneurial skill simply does not significantly predict academic achievement of students in the university system. The inverse or negative relationship between entrepreneurial skill and academic achievement is surprising. This study agrees with Xiaoxia (1999) and Olatoye, (2010) who reports that entrepreneurial skill is rarely related to academic achievement. Given the parental and teaching practices in many homes and schools in Nigeria, one is not surprised by the result of this study. Hassan (2001) also alluded to the fact that the inherited pattern of assessment in Nigeria is usually restricted to one (cognitive) of the aspects of learning outcomes at the end of teaching-learning process and does not encourage innovativeness and creativity in the teacher and the learner.

It is therefore not surprising that many known skillful celebrities like Darwin, the Nigeria's Mathematical genius, Professor Chike Obi, Professor Wole Soyinka (a Nobel Laureate) and Late Chief GaniFawehimi (an internationally acclaimed human right activist and lawyer), among others, were not known to be high academic achievers in their school days. Entrepreneurial persons are not likely to be high academic achievers. Skillfulness has been identified as a key requirement of entrepreneurship which has been adopted nationally, as a major curriculum objective. This therefore calls for a review of the curriculum, teaching and evaluation strategies in line with the need for promoting entrepreneurial skills as a tool for enhancing entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

According to Nwosu (2004), creativity cannot be created but it can be nurtured or cultivated and it can also be destroyed. When a study reports that there is no significant influence or relationship between entrepreneurial skill and academic achievement, there is likely to be a problem in such a system. Gardiner (1980), Songer, Lee and Kam (2002) are of the opinion that

all the classrooms should be a modeled garden. The teacher is the gardener who needs to cultivate students' potential so that they will grow into skillful adults.

Bartel (2001) asserted that entrepreneurial skill has been stifled in many children. The need for lecturers in universities to teach skillfully cannot therefore be overemphasised.

In this study, there is no significant difference between male and female levels of skillfulness and academic achievement. Naderi*et al* (2008) also found there was no gender difference on creativity as the whole. However, the findings revealed gender differences in subscales scores. According to this result, females scored higher than males in the in initiative factor, while males scored higher than females in the environmental sensitivity factor.

Naderi, Abdullah, Tengku-Aizan, Sharir and Kumar (2009) reported that entrepreneurial skill is not a significant predictor of academic achievement among undergraduate students in Iran, also using CGPA scores as measures of student achievement. Gender difference in academics achievement seems to vary depending on the school subject or course being considered. For example, Deary*et al* (2007) found that there was gender difference in educational attainment. Girls performed better than boys on overall academics subjects (courses). There was also significant gender difference in all academic subjects (courses) scores, except physics; girls performed better in every topic except physics.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The negative relationship between entrepreneurial skill and academic achievement is surprising. This points to an anomaly in our school curriculum and or the method of course delivery. Such a situation negates the objectives of the university system which is expected to produce technological and entrepreneurial education. Entrepreneurial skill is required for academic achievement which the present university system probably does not measure or emphasize.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that entrepreneurship should be taught, facilitated and assessed in the educational system. Teachers have to be trained to know and adopt methods which foster complementary values by fostering skillfully-friendly school environment. It is therefore, important that school authorities manage the students and teachers in a way that encourages the culture of entrepreneurial values. These values should be recognized and rewarded. Learning environment should be rich in team spirit, tolerance of the genuine mistake caused by entrepreneurial predisposition.

Table 1: List of Universities and number of respondents

SECTOR	**FREQUENCY**
Abia State University, Uturu (ABSU)	147
Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike (MOUAU)	193
Total	**340**

Table 2 Relative contribution of entrepreneurial skills of students to academic achievement

	Sum of square	**df**	**Mean square**	**F-cal**	**Sign**	**Remark**
Regression	5.7120	1	5.712	0.004	64.909	NS
Residual	29.758	338	0.088			
Total	35.470	339				
R	= 0.04					

R^2 = 0.000
Adjusted R^2= -0.004
Std Error = 0.4250
NS = Not Significant, p > 0.05

Table 3: Relationship between levels of entrepreneurial skill of the university students on their academic achievement?

Variable	N	Mean	Std Dev.	Df	r	p	Rmls
Entrepreneurial skill	340	162.661	4.352	338	-0.005	0.354	NS
CGPA scores	340	160.826	7.693				

NS = Not Significant, p > 0.05

Table 4: Comparison of entreprenuerial skill and academic achievement of male and female students

Variable	Gender	N	Mean	Std Dev.	Df	t	p	Rmks
Entrepreneurial skill	Male	184	161.233	8.461	338	0.516	0.616	NS
	Female	156	125.577	8.115				
Academic achievement	Male	184	4.364	0.250	338	-0.116	0.861	NS
	Female	156	3.437	0.224				

NS = Not Significant, p > 0.05

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