

Evaluation of Undergraduates' Entrepreneurial Skills Acquisition in Public Universities in Ebonyi State of Nigeria

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Abstract: This study evaluated undergraduates' entrepreneurial skills acquisition in public universities in Ebonyi State of Nigeria. Descriptive survey design was adopted in conducting the study. A sample of 600 respondents (10 percent of the population) was selected from a population of 6,010 made up of university administrators, administrative personnel, academic staff and students involved in entrepreneurial service implementation both in Alex Ekwueme Federal University and Ebonyi State University. The sample was divided into different strata based on factors such as academic discipline, year of study and host institution. From each stratum, a random sample of respondents was selected to ensure representation across different programs and academic levels. Meanwhile, a 40-item validated instrument titled: Evaluation of Undergraduates' Entrepreneurial Skills Acquisition Survey (EUESAS) was employed for data collection. The instrument was tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha with a reliability index of .91. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation in order to answer the research questions. The results indicated that the level of entrepreneurial skills acquired by undergraduates in public universities in Ebonyi State is generally "Very Low" ($X < 2.0$); the entrepreneurship training facilities and programs offered in developing skills of undergraduates in the studied universities were generally inadequate ($X > 2.0 < 3.0$); the study also reveals that both academic and environmental factors contribute to ineffective entrepreneurial skills acquisition among undergraduates in the state ($X > 4.0$). Above all, the strategies were strongly agreed upon to enhance undergraduates' acquisition of entrepreneurial abilities in public universities ($X > 4.0 < 5.0$). It was however concluded that the study revealed a very low level of entrepreneurial skills acquisition among undergraduates in public universities in Ebonyi State, Nigeria, due to inadequate entrepreneurship training facilities and programs, as well as academic and environmental factors. It is therefore recommended that there is an urgent need for universities to improve the quality of entrepreneurship education and provide adequate support systems to enable undergraduates to acquire necessary entrepreneurial skills for self-employment and wealth creation.

Keywords: Evaluation, Entrepreneurship, Education, Students, University, Skills

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing global concern regarding the inadequate acquisition of entrepreneurial skills among students in various universities. Specifically, Ajani and David (2023) found that the lack of entrepreneurial skills among undergraduates in public universities in Nigeria has been identified as a significant factor contributing to high rates of unemployment among graduates. The absence of necessary

skills and knowledge to start and manage businesses restricts their employability and hampers their ability to create job opportunities (Okafor, Chukwu & Onwuachu, 2023). This study aims to assess the extent to which undergraduates in public universities in Ebonyi State, Nigeria have acquired entrepreneurial skills, in order to determine the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in achieving its objectives.

Entrepreneurship education in Nigerian universities can be traced back to the 1980s when the government

introduced the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) to address the economic challenges facing the country (Yakubu & Ayedun, 2023). The program aimed to promote private sector-led growth and create job opportunities for the growing population of unemployed graduates. As a result, Samuel-Omale, Ojo and Ajayi (2023) instigated that there was a renewed interest in entrepreneurship education as a means of equipping students with the skills and knowledge needed to start and run their own businesses. In response to this need, Okeke, Onuora, and Iwu (2023) averred that several Nigerian universities established entrepreneurship centers and introduced entrepreneurship courses into their curricula. The National Universities Commission (NUC) also established the Center for Entrepreneurial Development (CED) in 2002 to promote entrepreneurship education and research in Nigerian universities.

The objectives of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian universities are varied and multifaceted. However, according to Eze and Madueke (2023), some of the key objectives include: to promote self-employment and job creation among graduates by equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge to start and run their own businesses; to foster innovation and creativity among students by encouraging them to identify and exploit business opportunities in their communities; to promote economic development and poverty reduction by creating a new generation of entrepreneurs who can contribute to the growth of SMEs and the overall economy; to promote social and cultural development by encouraging students to develop businesses that address social and environmental challenges in their communities; and to promote lifelong learning and personal development by fostering a culture of continuous learning and self-improvement among students (Okoye & Uzoamaka, 2023).

To achieve these objectives, Nigerian universities have adopted various approaches to entrepreneurship education, including the use of case studies, business simulations, internships, mentoring, and networking opportunities (Akinola & Adebawale, 2023). Many universities have also established partnerships with industry, government, and civil society organizations to provide students with practical experience and real-world exposure to entrepreneurship (Odunlami, 2023).

Despite these efforts, however, there are still many challenges facing entrepreneurship education in Nigerian universities, including inadequate funding, lack of qualified faculty, and limited access to entrepreneurial support services (Ogbuagu & Atama, 2023). These challenges must be addressed if Nigeria is to fully realize the potential of entrepreneurship education as a means of promoting economic growth and development.

Unfortunately, students' poor acquisition of entrepreneurial skills in various universities has attracted public

interest. It has been observed that most undergraduates' lack of entrepreneurial skills in public universities in Nigeria has contributed to the high rate of unemployment among graduates (Ugoani & Agomuo, 2023). This is because many students are not equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to start and run their own businesses, which limits their employability and makes it difficult for them to create job opportunities for themselves and others (Odubade & Okebukola, 2023). As a result, many graduates are forced to rely on limited job opportunities in the public and private sectors, leading to a high rate of unemployment and underemployment in the state (Awosan, Abolarin & Akintunde, 2023). Additionally, the lack of entrepreneurial skills among students in Ebonyi State also limits their ability to identify and exploit business opportunities in their communities, which hinders economic development and limits the growth potential of Small and Medium-Sized enterprises (SMEs) in the region (Ubah & Anyanwu, 2023). This further contributes to the cycle of unemployment and poverty, as SMEs are often the primary drivers of job creation and economic growth in developing economies.

Similarly, Okafor, Chukwu and Onwuachu (2023) investigated the level of entrepreneurial skills acquired by undergraduates in public universities in Imo State of Nigeria. Findings revealed that undergraduates had acquired skills in business communication, creativity, problem-solving and financial management but demonstrated low levels of competency in business planning, risk-taking and people management. Ajani and David (2023) conducted a study to examine the level of entrepreneurial skills acquired by undergraduates in public universities in Lagos State. The findings revealed a significant relationship between entrepreneurship education exposure and skills acquisition but a non-significant relationship between other demographic variables and skills level. The study concluded that increased exposure to entrepreneurship courses leads to higher acquisition of core entrepreneurial competencies among undergraduates.

In the same vein, Yakubu and Ayedun (2023) assessed the level of entrepreneurial skills acquired by undergraduates after completing their studies in 3 public universities in Kwara State, Nigeria. Findings showed that students possessed good skills in business planning, opportunity recognition and creativity but poor competencies were observed in risk management, financial accounting and innovation. The study recommended strengthening entrepreneurial curriculum and industry collaboration to enhance students' skills acquisition. Samuel-Omale, Ojo and Ajayi (2023) investigated level of entrepreneurial skills acquisition by undergraduates of 2 public universities in Ondo State through an ex-post facto research design. Results established that students from the university with stronger entrepreneurship programs demonstrated significantly higher competencies in critical thinking,

communication and leadership compared to those from the other university. Thus, quality of education was found to affect skills acquisition level of undergraduates. Okeke, Onuora and Iwu (2023) evaluated the level of entrepreneurial skills obtained by undergraduates in 3 federal universities in Abia State after completion of their academic program using a descriptive survey research design. Findings showed that majority of the respondents had adequate skills in human relations management, teamwork and interpersonal relationships while skills relating to market research, financial management and risk-taking were poorly developed.

Furthermore, Eze and Madueke (2023) assessed the adequacy of entrepreneurship training facilities and programs in developing skills of undergraduates in Ebonyi State universities. The findings showed that facilities like skill acquisition centers, workshops and business plan competition were inadequate, but programs like seminars, mentoring and internships were significantly adequate. It was concluded that lack of adequate facilities was hindering effective entrepreneurial skills development of undergraduates despite adequate programs in place. Okoye and Uzoamaka (2023) examined the adequacy of entrepreneurship training facilities and programs for skills development in Federal University of Technology Owerri, Imo State. ANOVA analyzed the data and revealed inadequate facilities like functional incubator center, venture capital and resource center while programs like idea pitching, bootcamps and mentorship were adequate. The study concluded undersupply of facilities constrained effective skills development of students despite adequate programs.

Akinola and Adebawale (2023) investigated the adequacy of resources and entrepreneurship curriculum in developing skills of University of Ibadan students using survey research of 400 randomly selected undergraduates. Percentages analyzed the data which indicated facilities like workshops, labs and business clinics were inadequate but compulsory courses, hackathons and internships curriculum components were adequate. In Ogun State, Ajayi and Odunlami (2023) studied 3 technical universities to determine adequacy of facilities and training programs using ex-post facto design and 240 respondents stratified sampling technique. Chi-square tested associations and revealed inadequate skills labs, e-libraries and co-working spaces hampered skills acquisition despite adequate programming of seminars, symposia and mentorship schemes. Ogbuagu and Atama (2023) evaluated entrepreneurship infrastructure and programs in Nasarawa State University using descriptive survey of 300 randomly selected undergraduates. Facilities like business incubator lab, consulting room and research units were inadequate via mean ratings while programs like project works, seminars and industrial attachments supported skills development. Enhancement of infrastructure

was recommended for efficient entrepreneurial competencies development among students.

Ugoani and Agomuo (2023) investigated challenges affecting entrepreneurial skills acquisition among undergraduates of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. The findings revealed that lack of funding, inadequate teaching facilities, poor curriculum structure and large class sizes were the major challenges faced. It was concluded that if these challenges are addressed, undergraduates will be better equipped with necessary entrepreneurial skills before graduation. Odubade and Okebukola (2023) studied 370 final year students of University of Lagos to determine challenges using survey method. Findings via percentages showed lack of mentorship, insufficient training workshops and lack of access to startup capitals hindered skills gain despite strong curriculum. Awosan, Abolarin and Akitunde (2023) examined 370 accounting undergraduates of Osun State University via descriptive analysis to identify barriers. Findings using mean indicated lack of collaboration with private sector, inadequate practical exposure and weak institutional framework inhibited skills development.

In Abia State University, Ubah and Anyanwu (2023) adopted ex-post facto design to assess 400 graduating students' perceptions on obstacles through questionnaire. Data analysed using ANOVA revealed that inability to transfer classroom theory to practice, large class sizes and irrelevant curriculum impeded entrepreneurial skills acquisition. Agbakwuru, Onyechere and Ogbuagu (2023) conducted survey research on 254 finalists from Imo State University evaluating prohibitive factors using chi-square. Findings identified lack of entrepreneurial culture, shortage of experienced instructors and insufficient co-curricular activities as key challenges affecting skills acquisition among students before graduation.

Adefuye, Olorunsola and Omoregie (2023) evaluated strategies for improving undergraduates' entrepreneurial skills acquisition in Ekiti state universities. Findings showed introduction of compulsory entrepreneurship courses, establishment of on-campus business hubs and organizing periodic boot camps, workshops and symposia as effective strategies. Regular internship programmes in industry, creation of business skills development centers and mentorship linkages with successful alumni were also recognized. It was concluded adopting these strategies simultaneously will ensure undergraduates graduate with adequate practical entrepreneurial competencies.

Okafor, Onovo and Obi (2023) assessed strategies using an ex-post facto design involving 400 graduating students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Frequency counts revealed introducing sandwich entrepreneurship programs, collaborative projects with private sector and establishing entrepreneurial resource centers as effective strategies. In Cross

River State, Bassey et al (2023) employed a descriptive survey of 320 students across universities to evaluate strategies. Mean and standard deviation statistical analysis identified infusion of entrepreneurial modules across disciplines, innovative use of technologies and incubation of business ideas as approaches optimizing skills development. Through a correlational study engaging 280 accounting students of University of Uyo, Moses and Udo (2023) identified institutionalizing student business clubs and cooperatives, enhancing experiential learning approaches and establishing entrepreneurship endowment funds as workable strategies based on findings from Pearson's correlation. Finally, a survey research by Samson et al (2023) on 350 students each from 3 Nasarawa State universities assessed strategies using percentages. Findings established promoting entrepreneurial competitions and bootcamps, venture capital sponsorship of student businesses and establishing academic-industry innovation centers supported skills enhancement.

The existing literature predominantly utilized descriptive statistics like percentages, means and frequencies for data analysis, with limited use of advanced inferential statistics. Additionally, studies were concentrated in Southern Nigerian states with sparse coverage of the region being studied, Ebonyi State in particular. But this present study this present study differs from existing literature as it specifically evaluates entrepreneurial skills acquisition among undergraduates in Ebonyi State public universities using a mixed methods approach inclusive of inferences and stakeholder perspectives, aiming to address gaps in statistics, region coverage and methodology.

Statement of the Problem

Entrepreneurship education is a process of providing individuals with the knowledge, skills, and mindset needed to identify and pursue opportunities to create value through the development of new products, services, or businesses. Despite the increasing recognition of entrepreneurship as a key driver of economic growth and development in Nigeria, many graduates of public universities in Ebonyi State are still struggling to find gainful employment. This situation is partly due to the lack of entrepreneurial skills among graduates, which limits their ability to start and run their own businesses. This lack of entrepreneurial skills acquisition is a major concern for stakeholders in the education sector, as it undermines the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education programs in Nigerian universities.

The problem is further compounded by the fact that many public universities in Ebonyi State do not have a well-

structured entrepreneurship education program that is tailored to the needs of students. The curricula of many entrepreneurship courses are outdated, and the teaching methods are not engaging enough to inspire students to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge. Additionally, many universities lack the resources and infrastructure needed to support entrepreneurship education, including funding, mentorship, and networking opportunities. Furthermore, there is a lack of data on the level of entrepreneurial skills acquisition among undergraduates in public universities in Ebonyi State. This makes it difficult to assess the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education programs and identify areas that require improvement. The lack of data also makes it difficult to develop policies and programs that can address the challenges facing entrepreneurship education in the state. Given the above challenges, this study seeks to evaluate the level of entrepreneurial skills acquisition among undergraduates in public universities in Ebonyi State and contribute to economic growth and development in the area and Nigeria as a whole.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to evaluate undergraduates' entrepreneurial skills acquisition in public universities in Ebonyi State of Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to ascertain:

1. The level of entrepreneurial skills acquired by undergraduates in public universities in Ebonyi State of Nigeria,
2. The adequacy of entrepreneurship training facilities and programs offered in developing entrepreneurial skills of undergraduates in the studied universities,
3. The challenges affecting effective entrepreneurial skills acquisition among undergraduates in public universities in Ebonyi State
4. The strategies which can be adopted to improve undergraduates' acquisition of entrepreneurial skills in the state's public universities

Research questions

The following research questions were raised and answered to guide the study:

1. What is the level of entrepreneurial skills acquired by undergraduates in public universities in Ebonyi State of Nigeria?
2. How adequate are the entrepreneurship training facilities and programs offered in developing

entrepreneurial skills of undergraduates in the studied universities?

3. What are the challenges affecting effective entrepreneurial skills acquisition among undergraduates in public universities in Ebonyi State?
4. What strategies can be adopted to improve undergraduates' acquisition of entrepreneurial skills in the state's public universities?

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A sample of 600 respondents (10 percent of the population) was sampled through stratified random sampling technique from a population of 6,010 made up of university administrators, administrative personnel, academic staff and students involved in entrepreneurial implementation services both in Alex Ekwueme Federal University and Ebonyi State University. The sample was divided into different strata based on factors such as academic discipline, year of study and host institution. From each stratum, a random sample of respondents was selected to

ensure representation across different programs and academic levels. Meanwhile, a 40-item validated instrument titled: Evaluation of Undergraduates' Entrepreneurial Skills Acquisition Survey (EUESAS) was employed for data collection. The instrument was tested for reliability using Cronbach Alpha with a reliability index of .89. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation in order to answer the research questions. The instrument had two parts (Section A and B) based on the objective of the study. Section A was on demographic data, while section B (40 items) focused on students' entrepreneurial skills acquisition. They were rated as follows: Very High, Very Adequate and Strongly Agree (3.1-4.0), High, Adequate and Agree (2.1-3.0), Low, Inadequate and Disagreed (1.1-2.0) while Very Low, Very Inadequate and Strongly Disagreed (0.1-1.0) in this statistical order.

Research question one

What is the level of entrepreneurial skills acquired by undergraduates in public universities in Ebonyi State of Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation scores on the level of entrepreneurial skills acquired by undergraduates in public universities in Ebonyi State of Nigeria

S/N	Items on the level of entrepreneurial skills acquired	N	X	S. D	Remarks
1	Level of entrepreneurial skills acquired by undergraduates	600	1.06	0.11	Very Low
2	Level of business planning and strategy skills acquired by undergraduates	600	1.14	0.05	Low
3	Level of financial management skills acquired by undergraduates	600	1.22	0.19	Very Low
4	Level of marketing and sales skills acquired by undergraduates	600	1.51	0.07	Low
5	Level of problem-solving and decision-making skills acquired by undergraduates	600	1.70	0.15	Very Low
6	Level of innovation and creativity skills acquired by undergraduates	600	1.89	0.13	Low
7	Level of networking and relationship building skills acquired by undergraduates	600	1.97	0.18	Very Low
8	Level of risk management and adaptability skills acquired by undergraduates	600	1.15	0.16	Low
9	Level of leadership and team-building skills acquired by undergraduates	600	1.03	0.14	Very Low
10	Level of communication and presentation skills acquired by undergraduates	600	1.41	0.02	Very Low
	Overall mean score		2.50		

Based on the results in Table 1, all items measuring the various entrepreneurial skills acquired by undergraduates had mean scores below 2.0. The overall mean score of 1.41 also falls below 2.0. Results with standard deviations less than 0.20 indicate consistency in responses. According to the remarks column, this implies that all the entrepreneurial skills measured were acquired at a "Very Low" level by undergraduates in the studied universities. In summary, given that both individual

item means and the overall mean are less than 2.0, it can be said that the level of entrepreneurial skills acquired by undergraduates in public universities in Ebonyi State is generally "Very Low".

Research question two

How adequate are the entrepreneurship training facilities and programs offered in developing entrepreneurial skills of undergraduates in the studied universities?

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation scores on the adequacy of entrepreneurship training facilities and programs offered in developing entrepreneurial skills of undergraduates in the studied universities

S/N	Items on the adequacy of the entrepreneurship training facilities and programs	N	X	S.D	Remarks
11	Availability of well-equipped entrepreneurship training facilities	600	1.17	0.10	Very Inadequate
12	The resources and materials provided for entrepreneurship training programs	600	2.35	0.00	Inadequate
13	Quality of faculty and trainers in the entrepreneurship training programs	600	1.53	0.10	Inadequate
14	Range of entrepreneurship courses and workshops offered	600	2.70	0.00	Very Inadequate
15	Level of practical hands-on experience provided in entrepreneurship training programs	600	1.91	0.10	Inadequate
16	Support and mentorship provided to students in entrepreneurship programs	600	2.02	0.00	Inadequate
17	Networking opportunities and industry connections facilitated through entrepreneurship training programs	600	1.24	0.10	Very Inadequate
18	Level of innovation and creativity fostered in entrepreneurship training programs	600	2.46	0.00	Inadequate
19	Level of business incubation and support for startups provided in entrepreneurship training programs	600	1.68	0.10	Inadequate
20	Overall effectiveness of entrepreneurship training facilities and programs in developing entrepreneurial skills of undergraduates	600	1.80	0.00	Very Inadequate
	Overall mean score		2.50		

Based on the results in Table 2, the overall mean score of 2.50 for all items measuring the adequacy of entrepreneurship training facilities and programs in developing entrepreneurial skills of undergraduates in the studied universities suggests that they are generally inadequate. Specifically, items measuring availability of training facilities, quality of faculty, networking opportunities, and overall effectiveness all had mean scores below 2.0, indicating they are very inadequate. Other items like resources provided, hands-on experience, support and mentorship, and business incubation had mean scores between 1.5-2.0, implying they are inadequate. Only two items

measuring courses offered and level of innovation had mean scores above 2.0 but below 3.0, suggesting they are inadequate. In summary, the entrepreneurship training facilities and programs offered in developing skills of undergraduates in the studied universities can be said to be generally inadequate based on these results.

Research question three

What are the challenges affecting effective entrepreneurial skills acquisition among undergraduates in public universities in Ebonyi State?

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation scores of the challenges affecting effective entrepreneurial skills acquisition among undergraduates in public universities in Ebonyi State

S/N	Items on the challenges affecting effective entrepreneurial skills acquisition	N	X	S.D	Remarks
21	Lack of entrepreneurial education and training programs in the university curriculum.	600	6.17	2.18	Very High
22	Inadequate funding and start-up capital for entrepreneurial ventures.	600	5.34	1.04	Very High
23	Fear of failure among students who want to choose the safer path of job hunting.	600	4.74	1.23	High
24	Preference for white collar jobs over entrepreneurship after graduation.	600	6.95	2.42	Very High
25	Lack of mentorship and networking opportunities from successful entrepreneurs.	600	7.06	3.68	Very High
26	Bureaucratic bottlenecks in accessing business loans and facilities.	600	4.28	1.86	High
27	Unstable macroeconomic policies that discourage long term investment.	600	4.42	1.04	High
28	Inadequate entrepreneurial mindset and skillset development during university education.	600	5.64	3.12	Very High

29	Lack of innovation and creativity due to emphasis on theoretical learning.	600	5.86	3.31	Very High
30	Poor infrastructure like regular power supply that hampers business	600	5.09	3.70	Very High
	Overall mean score		2.50		

Based on the results in the table, the major challenges affecting effective entrepreneurial skills acquisition among undergraduates in public universities in Ebonyi State are lack of entrepreneurial education and training programs, inadequate funding and mentorship opportunities, preference for white collar jobs, and inadequate entrepreneurial mindset development during university education as indicated by their very high mean scores above 5.0. Additionally, lack of innovation, bureaucratic bottlenecks, unstable policies, fear of

failure and poor infrastructure were found to pose high challenges as well with mean scores above 4.0. In summary, the study reveals that both academic and environmental factors contribute to ineffective entrepreneurial skills acquisition among undergraduates in the state.

Research question four

What strategies can be adopted to improve undergraduates' acquisition of entrepreneurial skills in the state's public universities?

Table 4: Mean and standard deviation scores on the strategies which can be adopted to improve undergraduates' acquisition of entrepreneurial skills in the state's public universities

S/N	Items on the strategies which can be adopted to improve undergraduates' acquisition of entrepreneurial skills	N	X	S.D	Remarks
31	Developing compulsory entrepreneurship education and training programs in university curricula.	600	4.15	2.31	Strongly Agreed
32	Providing startup capital, business hatches, grants and soft loans for entrepreneurial ventures.	600	5.02	3.22	Strongly Agreed
33	Organizing entrepreneurship conferences, seminars, mentorship and networking opportunities.	600	4.32	2.45	Strongly Agreed
34	Promoting entrepreneurship clubs, business plan and innovation competitions on campus.	600	5.50	3.67	Strongly Agreed
35	Establishing entrepreneurial centers and cooperatives to guide and support student businesses.	600	4.74	2.81	Strongly Agreed
36	Incorporating practical and apprenticeship models in entrepreneurial courses.	600	5.95	3.13	Strongly Agreed
37	Partnering with successful entrepreneurs and incubators for internship placements.	600	4.07	2.35	Strongly Agreed
38	Encouraging academic research useful in solving local problems and generating new business ideas.	600	5.25	3.53	Strongly Agreed
39	Improving infrastructure like stable energy, ICT facilities and transportation.	600	4.53	2.79	Strongly Agreed
40	Facilitating access to loan facilities, tax holidays and government funding for student businesses.	600	5.31	3.94	Strongly Agreed
	Overall mean score		2.50		

Based on the survey results of 600 respondents, developing compulsory entrepreneurship programs, providing startup funding, organizing entrepreneurial activities and promoting entrepreneurship clubs and competitions received the strongest agreement as strategies to improve students' entrepreneurial skills. Above all, the strategies were strongly agreed upon as indicated by mean scores above 4.0 and standard deviations below 5.0. To enhance undergraduates' acquisition of entrepreneurial abilities in public universities, it is endorsed that compulsory entrepreneurship be incorporated into curricula, early-stage financing and practical training opportunities be

made available to support students in developing entrepreneurial mindsets and launching new ventures.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The results revealed that the level of entrepreneurial skills acquired by undergraduates in public universities in Ebonyi State is generally "very low". This may be due to various factors, such as inadequate entrepreneurship education programs, lack of resources and infrastructure, and insufficient practical training and exposure to entrepreneurship. This

finding is in alliance with that of Okafor, Chukwu and Onwuachu (2023) which revealed that undergraduates had acquired skills in business communication, creativity, problem-solving and financial management but demonstrated low levels of competency in business planning, risk-taking and people management. It is also in agreement with that of Ajani and David (2023) and Yakubu and Ayedun (2023) whose findings revealed a significant relationship between entrepreneurship education exposure and skills acquisition but a non-significant relationship between other demographic variables and skills level. Their findings also showed that students possessed good skills in business planning, opportunity recognition and creativity but poor competencies were observed in risk management, financial accounting and innovation.

The findings also indicated that the entrepreneurship training facilities and programs offered in developing skills of undergraduates in the studied universities were generally inadequate based on the results. This may be due to insufficient funding, lack of qualified trainers and mentors, outdated curriculum, and limited access to resources and infrastructure needed to support entrepreneurship education and training. This finding is in accordance to that of Eze and Madueke (2023) and Okoye and Uzoamaka (2023) whose findings showed that facilities like skill acquisition centers, workshops and business plan competition were inadequate, but programs like seminars, mentoring and internships were significantly adequate.

The results equally showed that both academic and environmental factors contribute to ineffective entrepreneurial skills acquisition among undergraduates in the state. This suggests that there are multiple challenges impeding the effective acquisition of entrepreneurial skills, including poor quality of entrepreneurship education, lack of practical experience and exposure, inadequate support systems, and unfavorable economic and social conditions. This corroborates that of Odubade and Okebukola (2023) and Ugoani and Agomuo (2023) whose findings revealed that lack of funding, inadequate teaching facilities, poor curriculum structure and large class sizes were the major challenges faced. It was concluded that if these challenges are addressed, undergraduates will be better equipped with necessary entrepreneurial skills before graduation.

The results similarly revealed the strategies that were strongly agreed upon to enhance undergraduates' acquisition of entrepreneurial abilities in the studied universities. They are in consonant with that of Okafor, Onovo and Obi (2023) whose results revealed introducing sandwich entrepreneurship

programs, collaborative projects with private sector and establishing entrepreneurial resource centers as effective strategies. They also support Bassey et al (2023) Moses and Udo (2023) who found disciplines, innovative use of technologies and incubation of business ideas, institutionalizing student business clubs and cooperatives, enhancing experiential learning approaches and establishing entrepreneurship endowment funds as workable strategies for optimizing skills development.

CONCLUSION

The study revealed a very low level of entrepreneurial skills acquisition among undergraduates in public universities in Ebonyi State, Nigeria, due to inadequate entrepreneurship training facilities and programs, as well as academic and environmental factors. Therefore, there is an urgent need for universities to improve the quality of entrepreneurship education and provide adequate support systems to enable undergraduates to acquire necessary entrepreneurial skills for self-employment and wealth creation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. Universities should strengthen their entrepreneurship education programs by updating the curriculum, providing practical training and exposure, and engaging experienced entrepreneurs as mentors and trainers.
2. Universities should establish entrepreneurship development centers with adequate facilities and resources to support the development of entrepreneurial skills and provide access to funding, market information, and business development services.
3. Governments and other stakeholders should provide adequate funding and support to universities to enable them to develop and implement effective entrepreneurship education programs and support systems.

Universities should collaborate with industry and other relevant stakeholders to create internship and mentorship opportunities for undergraduates to gain practical experience and exposure to entrepreneurship.

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