

ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS ACQUISITION AND EMPLOYMENT GENERATION IN KWARA STATE

BY

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Abstract

The acquisition of skills has demonstrably ascended to the forefront of societal priorities due to its undeniable impact on advancing socioeconomic well-being. In terms of the economy, gaining new skills revitalizes markets and creates new opportunities for unemployed graduates and young individuals. Youth unemployment remains an ongoing problem in Nigeria, posing significant challenges for the nation. Addressing this issue and finding viable solutions has become increasingly urgent. The qualitative study conducted in Kwara State explored entrepreneurial skills acquisition and employment generation among alumni of IVTEC AjaseIpo. Through face-to-face interviews with 12 alumni, the study focused on skills acquired, methods of skills acquisition, and employment through entrepreneurial endeavors. Findings revealed a synthesis of technical skills, entrepreneurial skills, ICT competencies, soft skills, and adaptability/resilience among participants. These skills were acquired through hands-on training, real-world projects, industry internships, interactive learning, mentorship, and extracurricular activities. Participants leveraged their skills to establish successful entrepreneurial ventures, contributing to job creation and economic development in the region. The study underscores the importance of holistic skill development and entrepreneurship education in preparing individuals for the workforce and fostering sustainable economic growth. Recommendations include prioritizing practical entrepreneurship education in educational curricula, establishing entrepreneurship centers, facilitating industry internships, raising awareness about skill acquisition and entrepreneurship, and providing ongoing support for entrepreneurs. Implementing these recommendations can create an enabling environment for skills acquisition, entrepreneurship, and employment generation, driving economic prosperity in Kwara State.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Skills, Vocational Training, Industry Internships, Interactive Learning, Mentorship

Introduction

The pursuit of entrepreneurial endeavors has emerged as a key driver of innovation, economic growth, and job creation in the dynamic world of global economies. Because the corporate world is ever-changing, people need to be able to handle a variety of situations and grasp possibilities as they present themselves. As a result, developing entrepreneurial skills has become essential to promoting an innovative and enterprise-creating culture. Due to its importance in the socioeconomic advancement of society, the phenomenon of skill acquisition has become particularly significant. When it comes to the economy, acquiring new skills helps to revitalize markets and open up new employment chances for graduates and young people who are out of work. (Christine, 2023). Entrepreneurial skill acquisition is a multifaceted process that involves the development of competencies such as creativity, critical thinking, adaptability, and effective decision-making. These skills not only empower individuals to identify and capitalize on market gaps but also enable them to steer through the uncertainties and adversities that often accompany the entrepreneurial journey. In essence, the ability to acquire and refine these skills is instrumental in shaping aspiring entrepreneurs into resilient, visionary leaders capable of transforming ideas into sustainable enterprises. (Padi, 2022). In a global context marked by rapid technological advancements, shifting consumer preferences, and economic fluctuations, understanding the dynamics of entrepreneurial skill acquisition becomes paramount. This study will explore how educational institutions, training programs, and mentorship initiatives play a crucial role in nurturing and honing the entrepreneurial skills of individuals. Additionally, it will investigate the influence of socio-economic factors, cultural nuances, and policy frameworks on the development of entrepreneurial competencies.

The acquisition of skills has demonstrably ascended to the forefront of societal priorities due to its undeniable impact on advancing socioeconomic well-being. In terms of the economy, gaining new skills revitalizes markets and creates new opportunities for unemployed graduates and young individuals. Youth unemployment remains an ongoing problem in Nigeria, posing significant challenges for the nation. Addressing this issue and finding viable solutions has become increasingly urgent. Giving young people the necessary information and skills to enable them to become independent and make valuable contributions to the Nigerian economy is one possible approach. In order to tackle youth unemployment, this study will look at the need of empowering young people through skill acquisition and how it may be done.

The acquisition of entrepreneurial skills has become increasingly crucial for individuals aiming to navigate the complexities of starting and sustaining businesses in the state. This study seeks to delve into the specific socio-economic factors shaping the entrepreneurial landscape in Kwara State, exploring how local context influences the acquisition and application of entrepreneurial skills. One of the key characteristics that best describes an entrepreneur is their willingness to take risks. These can include branching out into uncharted territory, lending a sizable sum of money to projects that have questionable prospects, or taking on debt (Lumpkin & Dess, 2001). Risk-taking, according to Salau et al. (2019), is connected to engaging in specific actions like allocating priceless resources to venture capitalists in unstable situations. Entrepreneurs have been associated with a risk-taking nature, which has distinguished them from other people. Wang (2022) noted that a company cannot advance if its risk tolerance is too low. If successful, businesses with a strong propensity for taking risks typically achieve greater long-term growth and profitability (Wang and Poutziouris, 2010). It makes sense that companies with greater performance levels would likewise be more inclined to take risks (Salau et al., 2019).

Today, a huge unemployment is being paraded in many parts of the world especially Nigeria. This mainly occurs because most the unemployed youths lack innovative skills. Government's attitude to this problem is not also encouraging. Today's entrepreneurs found it difficult to establish the degree of influence being exerted on employment generation by science integration. It is evident that the level of technology transfer and technical skills is low when entrepreneurial development is being required. It is also observed that production have continuously been found difficult for lack of innovation. In the same vein, the society has not been able to adequately create and managed entrepreneurial opportunities in order to provide employment. However, Wang (2022) states that both private and public efforts are needed to develop policies that would lessen this threat. This study examined how entrepreneurial activities impact employment creation. Also, environmental regulators have expressed worry over Nigeria's waste management procedures throughout time. The nation's environmental policies continue to lag behind international standards or regulations.

Literature Review

The skills of an entrepreneur encompass a wide range of skill sets, such as problem-solving, creativity, leadership, time management, and business management. These skills are useful in many different industries and professions (Adedayo et al, 2020). These entrepreneurial skills are critical for promoting innovation, company growth, and competitiveness. It takes a broad range of abilities to get these abilities. For example, to thrive as an entrepreneur, you may need to improve your company management skills and raise your willingness to take risks (Putans, 2023).

Li (2022) submits that graduates in entrepreneurship were unable to find employment due to their lack of industry-required skills and confidence, as they had not been exposed to the business world during their school years. Nevertheless, a number of studies suggested that postsecondary education and skill development could result in self-employment or entrepreneurial activity (Ma, 2023; Leary, 2022). According to Bashford (2022), Padi (2022), and Barinua (2022) define skill acquisition as the procedure of showcasing active thinking or behavior patterns in a particular activity. In addition, he explained that the process of acquiring skills involves being able to complete a task or engage in an activity that is relevant to a purposeful endeavor, occupation or profession. He believes that in order to acquire a skill, one must gain the necessary knowledge, attitudes, thinking patterns, and ethical traits that allow the

learner to develop their cognitive, emotional, and ethical makeup, preparing them for a more promising future. Technical skills are the competence and proficiency to do tasks or jobs in a certain field Singh (2021). This can be seen as the principal's skills, information, and experience gained by education, training, and life events that can be used to address management issues in the school. Xin(2022) argued that the goal of providing administrators with proper training is to enable them to carry out their duties as administrators in an exceptional manner. Technical proficiency is essential for a school principal to be more productive; the success of the school is greatly influenced by a principal's knowledge of and use of technical proficiency in handling managerial issues.

Furthermore, according to Chukhlomin(2024), technical skills are linked to factual information about the organization, such as its rules, structure, and management practices, as well as employee characteristics. According to Singh (2021), investing in the technical skills that will improve the functions related to the technical aspect of organizational change and introducing a participatory management style are two ways to help organizational members regain their confidence and competence in order to handle performance increases. Good judgment, foresight, intuition, originality, and the capacity to come up with original solutions for organizational issues are all examples of conceptual skills (Abdullah, 2024). In particular, analytical aptitude, logical reasoning, concept creation, inductive reasoning, and deductive reasoning all of which are utilized to support change readiness and have a greater impact on organizational commitment are assessed through aptitude tests as conceptual skills (Nimran,*et al.*, 2024). The empirical review encompasses a series of studies probing into the nexus between entrepreneurial skill acquisition and enterprise creation, particularly within the context of Kwara State, Nigeria. The findings divulge critical insights into the challenges and opportunities inherent in nurturing entrepreneurship in the region. Jacob and Ariya (2015) study illuminates the shortcomings in entrepreneurship education at higher institutions, pointing to deficiencies in practical demonstrations and the lack of alignment between industry needs and educational curriculum. Moreover, the study highlights the prevalent inclination among Nigerian students towards government employment, advocating for the establishment of well-funded entrepreneurship centers within educational institutions to foster practical exposure and skill development. Onuma (2016) research delves into the pivotal role of entrepreneurial education in preparing graduates for the workforce. It underscores a significant correlation between entrepreneurial education and post-graduation employment, thereby emphasizing the importance of integrating entrepreneurship into educational curricula. Salau (2014) investigation sheds light on the attitudes of recent graduates towards skill acquisition. The findings underscore a lack of awareness among graduates regarding the skills acquired during their education, emphasizing the imperative for initiatives like the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) to incorporate skill acquisition training programs. Furthermore, Adetayo, *et al.* (2015) study delves into the impact of education on skill acquisition and its subsequent influence on job creation and performance among entrepreneurs. Their findings illuminate a positive correlation between education in skill acquisition, business establishment, and enhanced performance among respondents. While these studies contribute significantly to the discourse on skill acquisition and employment in Nigeria, there remains a notable research gap regarding the specific interplay between entrepreneurial skill development and enterprise establishment in Kwara State. This underscores the importance of further research to inform policy formulation and interventions aimed at fostering entrepreneurship and driving sustainable economic development in the region.

Methodology

Qualitative methodology was employed, utilizing face-to-face interviews to establish rapport with participants. This approach allows for in-depth exploration of selected issues and flexibility in data collection and analysis. Given the nature of entrepreneurial endeavors, which often require emotional maturity and strong interpersonal skills, face-to-face interviews are deemed suitable for capturing nuanced insights. The interview questions will focus on four main areas: Skills Acquired Ways of Skills acquisition and Employment through entrepreneurial endeavor A total of 12 Alumni of IVTEC were selected based on convenience and interviewed across different regions of Kwara State to ensure fair representation. The interviews was conducted in English in conducive environments, with each session lasting between 20 and 40 minutes. Audio recordings were made and transcribed for analysis. Efforts was made to

minimize bias by structuring the interview schedule carefully. Subjectivity was addressed through rigorous analysis and interpretation of findings, adhering to guidelines for qualitative research validity.

Results

The study on entrepreneurial skills acquisition and employment generation in Kwara State revealed several key thematic areas, each shedding light on the Skills Acquired, Ways of Skills acquisition and Employment through entrepreneurial endeavor.

Skills Acquired

The synthesis of skills acquired based on the study includes technical skills, entrepreneurial skills, ICT competencies, soft skills, and adaptability/resilience. Addressing these skill gaps and fostering holistic skill development is essential for preparing individuals for the dynamic demands of the labor market and driving sustainable economic growth and development

Technical Skills

Technical skills refer to the proficiency and expertise in performing specific tasks related to a particular field or industry. These skills are typically acquired through hands-on training, practical experience, and formal education. They are essential for individuals to effectively carry out their roles and responsibilities within various sectors, including engineering, information technology, healthcare, manufacturing, and construction, among others. Majority said they learnt sufficient contemporary technical skills at the collage. The following statements typify their views.

"I learned practical skills in my chosen profession. Ordinarily, I realized that the technical skill I acquired were beyond what is thought in the traditional local workshops"

Other respondents said;

"The institute equipped me with hands-on experience in electrical installations and maintenance. We were exposed to modern tools"

Similarly, another respondents said;

"I acquired proficiency in computer-aided design (CAD) and machining techniques."

Entrepreneurial Skills

Entrepreneurial skills encompass a range of competencies and abilities that are essential for identifying, creating, and capitalizing on business opportunities. These skills are vital for individuals who seek to start their own businesses, innovate within existing organizations, or navigate the dynamic landscape of the modern economy. Respondents commented on the importance of entrepreneurial skills. A respondent said.

As entrepreneurs must possess a creative mindset to identify novel solutions to problems or unmet needs in the market. I am trained to think outside the box, challenge the status quo, and generate innovative ideas that differentiate their products or services from competitors.

Another respondent reports that;

Entrepreneurship inherently involves risk-taking, by training we are made to adept at managing and mitigating risks. I conduct thorough market research, assess potential risks and uncertainties, and develop contingency plans to navigate challenges and setbacks effectively.

In another dimension, another respondents said

As a trained entrepreneur, I possess a keen eye for spotting opportunities in the market and capitalizing on emerging trends or gaps. I also have the ability to identify unmet needs, untapped markets, or inefficiencies in existing systems and transform them into viable business ventures.

He further added that;

We are trained to effectively develop clear and actionable business strategies to achieve our goals and objectives. We set short-term and long-term targets, outline the steps required to reach them, and adapt their plans in response to changing market dynamics or competitive pressures.

In another dimension, a respondent said:

My success hinges on sound financial management practices. Entrepreneurs must be proficient in budgeting, forecasting, and financial analysis to ensure the viability and sustainability of their ventures. I was trained to understand cash flow management, revenue generation, and investment decisions.

Lastly a respondent said

To me entrepreneurial skills are essential for individuals seeking to thrive in today's competitive and rapidly evolving business environment. Whether launching a startup, driving innovation within an organization, or pursuing new opportunities, cultivating these skills is crucial for entrepreneurial success. The entrepreneurship courses helped me understand the importance of innovation and adaptability in the business world.

Communication Skills

Communication skills are fundamental abilities that enable individuals to convey information effectively, both verbally and non-verbally, in various contexts and settings. Communication skills are critical competencies that underpin success in various aspects of life, including personal relationships, academic pursuits, and professional endeavors. Cultivating and honing these skills empowers individuals to express themselves confidently, build meaningful connections, and navigate complex social and professional landscapes with clarity and effectiveness. Respondents commented on the importance of entrepreneurial skills. Some of the respondent said.

"Through group projects and presentations, I improved my communication and teamwork skills."

Another respondent said;

"The institute emphasized the importance of clear and concise communication in both written and verbal forms."

To corroborate the above another respondent said;

"I learned how to effectively communicate technical information to non-technical audiences."

The above demonstrated that diverse range of competencies acquired by the alumni of IVTEC AjaseIpo.

Ways of Skills acquisition

Skills acquisition occur through various methods and approaches, tailored to individual learning styles and preferences. By leveraging these diverse methods of skills acquisition, individuals can tailor their learning experiences to suit their needs, interests, and career goals, empowering them to continually develop and adapt their skill sets in an ever-changing world

Hands-On Training

Hands-on training is a cornerstone of skill acquisition, providing individuals with invaluable practical experience and expertise in their chosen fields. In educational settings and vocational institutes, hands-on training is often facilitated through workshops, labs, and interactive sessions, where students engage directly with tools, equipment, and materials under the guidance of experienced instructors. Testimonials highlighting the significance of hands-on training in skill development is stated as thus;

"The institute provided extensive hands-on training in our chosen field, allowing us to practice and master technical skills under the guidance of experienced instructors."

In another dimension a respondent;

"We spent a significant amount of time in workshops and labs, working with tools and equipment to gain practical experience."

Real-World Projects

A respondents states that;

"We were involved in real-world projects that simulated industry scenarios, which helped us apply theoretical knowledge to practical situations."

Furthermore, another respondent noted,

"Working on projects gave us the opportunity to collaborate with peers, solve problems, and learn from each other's experiences."

Industry Internships

On industry internship, a respondent shared,

"IVTEC facilitated internships and work placements with local businesses, where we could further develop our skills in a professional setting."

Additionally, another respondent emphasized,

"The hands-on experience gained during internships was invaluable in bridging the gap between academic learning and real-world applications."

Interactive Learning:

A respondent mentioned that,

"Classes were interactive, with a focus on discussions, case studies, and interactive sessions rather than just lectures."

Another respondent added,

"We participated in group activities, presentations, and debates, which enhanced our communication and teamwork skills."

Practical Assignments

A respondent stated,

"Assignments were designed to be practical and relevant to industry standards, encouraging us to apply what we learned in a practical context."

Moreover, Respondent highlighted,

"We were given challenging assignments that required critical thinking and problem-solving skills, helping us develop these competencies."

Mentorship and Guidance

Some respondents reflected that ,

"We received mentorship and guidance from knowledgeable instructors who had years of industry experience."

Additionally, a respondent emphasized,

"Instructors provided constructive feedback and support, helping us improve our skills and overcome any difficulties we encountered."

Extracurricular Activities

In another dimension, a respondent K remarked,

"Extracurricular activities such as workshops, seminars, and competitions complemented our formal education and allowed us to explore additional areas of interest."

Furthermore, some respondents noted,

"Participating in extracurricular activities helped us develop leadership, teamwork, and organizational skills outside of the classroom."

These responses illustrate the various methods through which the alumni of IVTEC AjaseIpo acquired their skills, including hands-on training, real-world projects, industry internships, interactive learning, practical assignments, mentorship, and extracurricular activities.

Employment through entrepreneurial endeavor

Employment through entrepreneurial endeavor is the pathway of securing livelihood and creating job opportunities by starting and managing one's own business ventures. Unlike traditional employment where individuals work for employers, entrepreneurship involves taking initiative, assuming risks, and utilizing acquired skills and resources to establish and grow successful enterprises.

Entrepreneurship Ventures

These testimonials highlight the entrepreneurial endeavors embarked upon by individuals who acquired skills through IVTEC. They showcase how vocational training can empower individuals to start their own businesses and contribute to economic growth.

"After acquiring skills in carpentry, I started my own furniture-making business, which has now grown into a successful enterprise employing several individuals."

"I utilized my training in welding to establish a small welding and fabrication workshop, providing services to local businesses and individuals."

Networking

Networking plays a crucial role in career advancement and business growth. The following quotes illustrate how individuals leveraged networking opportunities provided by IVTEC and alumni associations to expand their professional connections and secure job opportunities.

"Through networking events organized by IVTEC and alumni associations, I connected with industry professionals who helped me secure job opportunities."

"Attending career fairs and industry conferences allowed me to build relationships with potential employers and clients, leading to job offers and business partnerships."

Internship and Work Experience

Internships and work experience are invaluable for translating classroom learning into practical skills and securing employment. The responses below exemplify how internships facilitated by IVTEC paved the way for successful careers for these individuals.

"The internships I completed during my time at IVTEC provided me with valuable work experience and helped me secure full-time employment after graduation."

I gained practical skills and industry connections through internships, which opened doors to employment opportunities upon completion of my program.

Self-Promotion and Marketing

Self-promotion and marketing are essential for entrepreneurs and job seekers alike to showcase their skills and attract opportunities. The quotes demonstrate how individuals utilized online platforms and local advertising to promote their skills and services effectively.

I leveraged social media platforms and online marketplaces to promote my skills and services, attracting clients and customers from across the region.

A respondent also states that;

By showcasing my portfolio and expertise through online platforms and local advertising, I was able to generate interest and inquiries from potential employers and clients.

Continued Education and Certification

Continuous learning and upskilling are essential for staying competitive in today's job market. Some respondents illustrated how individuals pursued further education and certifications to enhance their skills and qualifications after completing their programs at IVTEC.

For example, a respondent said;

After completing my program at IVTEC, I pursued further certifications and training courses to enhance my skills and qualifications, making myself more marketable to employers.

Another respondents states that;

I enrolled in specialized training programs and workshops to stay updated on industry trends and advancements, which helped me stand out in the job market.

Community Engagement

Community engagement not only benefits society but also enhances personal and professional development. The responses below exemplify how individuals contributed to community projects and initiatives, gaining valuable experience and building strong networks in the process

"I volunteered my skills and services to community projects and initiatives, which not only helped me gain valuable experience but also enhanced my reputation and credibility in the community."

Another respondent said;

"By actively participating in community events and projects, I built a strong network of contacts and referrals, leading to employment opportunities."

Utilizing Support Systems

Support systems, including career counseling and mentorship, are vital for navigating the job search process and career development. Two respondents showcase how individuals benefited from the guidance and assistance provided by IVTEC, mentors, and alumni networks.

The first respondent said;

"IVTEC provided career counseling and job placement assistance, which helped me navigate the job search process and identify suitable employment opportunities."

Another respondent said;

"I received guidance and support from mentors, family members, and alumni networks, who provided valuable advice and recommendations throughout my job search journey."

These responses demonstrate the various strategies employed by the alumni of IVTEC AjaseIpo to generate employment opportunities for themselves, including entrepreneurship ventures, networking, internships, self-promotion, continued education, community engagement, and utilizing support systems provided by the institute and other organizations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings of the study on entrepreneurial skills acquisition and employment generation in Kwara State underscore the importance of holistic skill development and entrepreneurship education in preparing individuals for the workforce and fostering sustainable economic growth. The synthesis of skills acquired by the alumni of IVTEC AjaseIpo encompasses technical skills, entrepreneurial skills, ICT competencies, soft skills, and adaptability/resilience. These skills are vital for navigating the dynamic demands of the labor market and driving innovation and entrepreneurship. Through hands-on training, real-world projects, industry internships, interactive learning, practical assignments, mentorship, and extracurricular activities, individuals acquired diverse competencies tailored to industry needs. Furthermore, participants leveraged their acquired skills to pursue employment through entrepreneurial endeavors, establishing businesses and contributing to job creation and economic development in Kwara State. Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Educational institutions should prioritize the integration of practical entrepreneurship education into their curricula. This includes providing hands-on training, industry-aligned projects, and mentorship programs to cultivate entrepreneurial mindset and skills among students.
2. Governments and educational institutions should collaborate to establish well-funded entrepreneurship centers within educational institutions. These centers should offer practical exposure, skill development, and support services to empower students and alumni to pursue entrepreneurship ventures.
3. Efforts should be made to facilitate industry internships and work placements for students, providing them with valuable real-world experience and industry connections. Government incentives and partnerships with local businesses can incentivize the creation of internship opportunities.
4. Initiatives should be launched to raise awareness among graduates about the importance of skill acquisition and entrepreneurship. This includes incorporating skill acquisition training programs into existing initiatives like the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) and disseminating information on available resources and support systems.

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