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ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION AND INNOVATIVENESS OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN RIVERS STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between entrepreneurship education and innovativeness of university students in rivers state. The study adopted a survey method. The target population for this study comprised of all 300 level and above students of University of Port Harcourt, Elechi Amadi Polytechnic and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, who have gone through the National Universities Commission's (NUC) compulsory entrepreneurship course. A total of 784 students participated in the study. A well-structured closed ended questionnaire was administered using purposive sampling. The Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (Rho) was employed to test the stated null hypothesis. The result showed a substantial positive association between entrepreneurship education and innovativeness. It was concluded that a pivotal determinant of the innovative awareness and capacity of an entrepreneur is the quality of entrepreneurship education acquired. When students are well groomed in relation to entrepreneurship, their confidence to engage in entrepreneurial activities increases as well as their capacity to innovate and create thriving startups. Consequently, creating the right entrepreneurial atmosphere that is supportive of entrepreneurial activities and developing a dynamic curriculum is an essential ingredient in preparing smart entrepreneurs. It was therefore recommended that varsities: should institute faculty/departmental officers on entrepreneurship, whose duties will include advising student on venture creation and also establish a bi-annual or annual. Entrepreneurship competition in order to sharpen students' entrepreneurial awareness and intention; and go beyond teaching the theoretical aspects of entrepreneurship and collaborate with private organizations and successful business persons, to develop curriculums that will effectively arm graduates with entrepreneurial skills, abilities and competencies required to thrive in the real business world.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship Education, Entrepreneurship Atmosphere, Entrepreneurship Curriculum, Innovativeness

Introduction

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government of Nigeria has forecasted that the nation's output may witness a 9% decline and a recession that could take up to the year 2023 to fully come out from (Omame, 2020). This process of recovery can only be realized as predicted, if the new ventures in the country thrive and live up to their full potential. This is because startups are critical contributors to Nigeria's post-pandemic recovery (Omame, 2020). Interestingly,extant literature is inundated with wide promulgation of the impact of innovativeness on the survival and growth of startups (e.g. Denison, 2007; Hornsby et al., 2009; Man et al., 2002).

Innovativeness has been at the front burner of scholarly discourse over the years. This is as a result of its importance to economic development, competitiveness and well-being (Lööf & Heshmati, 2006; Nasierowski & Arcelus, 2012; Rutten & Boekema, 2005). Innovative enterprises have been adjudged to be better positioned to identify, champion and implement novel ideas that will result in profitability and ensure a business outfit remains a going concern. In order words, businesses that survive and thrive in the midst of highly dynamic and complex environment are those whose culture encourages innovativeness (Oshi *et al.,* 2019).

Innovativeness reflects organization's inclination to be receptive to new technologies and ways of doing things, representing a deviation from the norm. It has to do with jettisoning the traditional ways of doing things for new technological ideas, products and internal processes (Baker & Sinkula, 2009). Innovativeness could either be technological or product-market based. The former involves research and development efforts and engineering, while the latter refers to new market niche, product design, and advertising and promotion. In the domain of entrepreneurial orientation, innovativeness entails a variety of new activities, programs or goods development or adoption approaches (Vora *et al.*, 2012).

Innovativeness is said to relate to an entrepreneurial mindset. In other words, the ability to be innovative is a function of one's perception about their capabilities. Interestingly, Wei *et al.* (2019:1) averred that, "entrepreneurship education is an important way for entrepreneurs to acquire resources, enhance innovative ability and innovative personality, and build multi-level learning channels for entrepreneurs by integrating various knowledge and value systems. They concluded that entrepreneurial education is a real way to provide students and educators with entrepreneurial competencies.

While studies on entrepreneurship education and innovativeness, as well as other determinants of innovativeness abound, there appears to be no empirical exploration that have been undertaken to ascertain the association between the variables in Rivers State, Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this study seeks to investigate the relationship between entrepreneurship education and innovativeness of university students in Rivers State.

Literature Review

Entrepreneurship Education

Entrepreneurship education is concerned with fostering creative skills that can be applied in practices, education, and environments supporting innovation (Binks et al., 2006; Gundry *et al.,* 2014). Entrepreneurship education is characterised by interactive learning that is linked to business and community initiatives (Boon *et al.*, 2013). This means there is a sense of industry connection in entrepreneurship education due to its experience-based learning approach. Often guest speakers and case studies are part of the entrepreneurship education

experience as teaching methods are not static but dynamic and subject to change with increasing usage of social media in the learning experience (Chawinga, 2017).

The two main schools of thought about entrepreneurship have been the causal and effectuation approach (Fayolle & Gailly, 2008). The causal approach views entrepreneurship being more related to economic plans and strategies as it focuses on how education impacts business development rates. The effectuation approach takes into account uncertain environments by suggesting entrepreneurs use available resources in terms of what is available to them (Gertz, Huang & Cry, 2018). Effectuationas a learning method can be helpful to understand how ideas can be developed then delivered into the marketplace (Ilonen & Heinonen, 2018).

Entrepreneurship Atmosphere and Innovativeness

Several scholarly endeavours have been dedicated to the concept of entrepreneurship atmosphere, the extent to which actions that enhances such atmosphere receives support from organizations and learning institutions, and its role in fostering entrepreneurial intentions (e.g. Geissler *et al.*, 2010; Kauffman Foundation, 2008). Extant studies indicate that a growing number of institutions of higher learning across the world, are putting policies in place to build an entrepreneurial environment that will engender students' entrepreneurial intention (Bergmanna *et al.*, 2018; Eickelpasch & Fritsch, 2005; Rasmussen & Borch, 2010). This is not unconnected to the emerging scholarly assertions that the social and organizational context in universities influences to a large degree, students' entrepreneurial behaviour (e.g. Hunter *et al.*, 2011; Walter *et al.*, 2013). There has also been suggestions that entrepreneurial education could be a means to achieve more interest, joy, engagement, and innovativeness and creativity among students (Johannisson, 2010; Lackéus, 2013). Consequently, this study presupposes that:

H_{01}: *There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurship atmosphere andinnovativeness.*

Entrepreneurship Curriculum and Innovativeness

The domain of entrepreneurship is awash with studies on the impact of universities' entrepreneurship curriculum on the entrepreneurial orientation (i.e. risk-taking, proactiveness and innovative capacity, etc.) of graduates (Boissin *et al.*, 2009; Dohse & Walter, 2010; Souitaris *et al.*, 2007). In their work, Dohse and Walter (2010) held the view that the quality of the curriculum of an entrepreneurial university builds self-efficacy and independence in students which are important business attributes. As such, universities should focus more attention on developing curricula that instil the right kind of entrepreneurial capabilities and attitudes. In the same vein, Boissin *et al.* (2009) posited that curriculum focused on business creation supports the development of capabilities such as development of business plan which, in turn, leads to the formation of own business. This corroborates with Souitaris *et al's* (2007) earlier opinion that the right kind of entrepreneurial curriculum instills complex problem solving competencies that helps graduates establish enduring and innovative startups. This shows that entrepreneurship curriculum of a university could elicit innovativeness. Hence we hypothesize that:

H_{02}: *There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurship curriculum and innovativeness.*

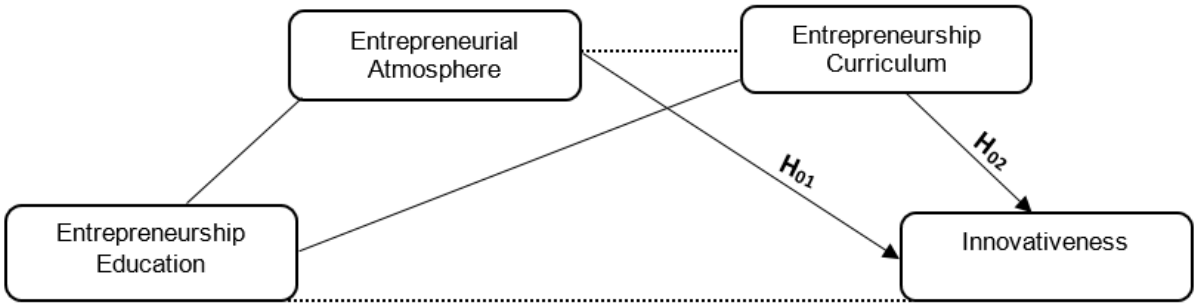

Figure 1: Hypothesized Model

Theoretical framework

Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB)

Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) is the foundational theory for this study. The TPB theory mainly emphasizes on individual's intention to perform a given behaviour. The theory assumes that entrepreneurial intention is explained by three motivational backgrounds, namely: personal attitude toward behaviour, perceived social norms and perceived behavioural control. Any of these three contexts has mutual consequences on the other.Most analyses of the impact of entrepreneurship education supposed that it is a self-planned behaviour. A linkage between attitudes, intentions and behaviour is used, based on the "Theory of Planned Behaviour" (TPB). If entrepreneurial education by environment and instruction influences people's entrepreneurial behavior, their business interests will also change, and this leads to the desired business orientation (particularly innovativeness).

Social Cognitive Theory

The theory holds that in behaviour, individuals are concerned with two expectations: Self efficacy (the expectations regarding one's ability to perform certain behaviour); and Expected outcome (the expected outcome(s) of the behavior). Bandura (1986) described self-efficacy as people's judgment of their capabilities to accomplish a certain level of performance. In his view, the emphasis is not on one's competence but the judgment of what one can do with this competence. Scholars have agreed that self-efficacy is task-specific and it's a conditional state that is proximal to behaviour; in other words, it has a direct impact on behaviour and can change over time as individuals derive new information and experiences (Chen *et al.*, 2000; Judge *et al.*, 2007). Simply put, Social cognitive theory conceives persons as agents and willing participants in the creation of life circumstances (Bandura, 2018). Individuals would prefer to follow their objectives if they regard their own talents and decisions to achieve the desired outcomes as being adequate (Bandura *et al.*, 2003). Entrepreneurship education helps improve students' cognition, constantly adjust their thoughts and actions, and make their entrepreneurship more directional, coherent and meaningful.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey method. The target population for this study comprise of all 300 level and above students of University of Port Harcourt, Elechi Amadi Polytechnic and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, who have gone through the National Universities Commission's (NUC) compulsory entrepreneurship course. A total of 784 students participated in the study. A well-structured closed ended questionnaire was administered using purposive sampling. A pilot survey was carried out to ascertain the internal consistency of the study instrument and the Composite Cronbach Alpha value was within the threshold of 0.7. The Spearman's Rank Order Correlation Coefficient (Rho) was employed to test the afore-stated null hypothesis.

Results and Discussion

This section is concerned with testing afore-stated null hypotheses, using Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient statistical tool and the p-values obtained.

Test of Hypotheses

Table 1: Entrepreneurial Atmosphere and Innovativeness ($H0_1$)

			Entrepreneurial Atmosphere	Innovativeness
Spearman's rho	Entrepreneurial Atmosphere	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.742**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	784	784
	Innovativeness	Correlation Coefficient	.742**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	784	784
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				

SPSS output, Version 20 – Field Survey, 2021

Table 1 reveals a strong positive association between entrepreneurial atmosphere and innovativeness (rho = .742, p = .000< 0.05). As such, the null hypothesis ($H0_1$) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted; implying that there is a significant positive relationship between entrepreneurial atmosphere and innovativeness (HA_1).

Table 2: Entrepreneurship Curriculum and Innovativeness ($H0_2$)

			Entrepreneurship Curriculum	Innovativeness
Spearman's rho	Entrepreneurship Curriculum	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.801**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	784	784
	Innovativeness	Correlation Coefficient	.801**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	784	784
**Correlation is significant at the 0.05evel (2-tailed).				

SPSS output, Version 20 – Field Survey, 2021

Table 2 reveals a strong positive association between entrepreneurial curriculum and innovativeness (rho = .742, p = .000< 0.05). As such, the null hypothesis (H02) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted; which means that a significant positive relationship exist between entrepreneurial curriculum and innovativeness (HA1).

Discussion of Findings

There test of the hypotheses revealed a significant positive correlation between the sub-constructs of entrepreneurship education (i.e. entrepreneurship atmosphere and entrepreneurship curriculum) and innovativeness of university students in Rivers State. This outcome is in tandem with several researches in that regard. For instance, some scholars have argued that students' ingenuity and creative personalities are propelled by quality entrepreneurship education as evident in the curriculum and climate of their universities (Brown & Ulijn, 2004; Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010). This is because entrepreneurship education gives students the skill sets and knowledge required to create something out of nothing. In their work, Souitaris *et al.* (2007) had averred that curriculum that focused on skills development has the potentials of developing student's ability to solve complex problems and make informed decisions. Corroborating this, Boissin *et al.* (2009) argued that quality entrepreneurial curriculum helps develop students' competencies and entrepreneurial capabilities.

In their work on how entrepreneurship education influences the innovative behaviour of students, Wei *et al.* (2019:1) recently asserted that, "entrepreneurship education is an important way for entrepreneurs to acquire resources, enhance innovative ability and innovative personality, and build multi-level learning channels for entrepreneurs by integrating various knowledge and value systems. From knowledge learning to skills improvement, entrepreneurship education includes general ability development and improvement of professional ability." They argued that entrepreneurship education serves as a veritable tool for instilling innovative capabilities in students and academics alike. Consequently, this study empirically affirms the extant suggestions of a significant nexus between entrepreneurship education and innovativeness.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study revealed that a pivotal determinant of the innovative awareness and capacity of an entrepreneur is the quality of entrepreneurship education acquired. When students are well groomed in relation to entrepreneurship, their confidence to engage in entrepreneurial

activities increases as well as their capacity to innovate and create thriving startups. Consequently, creating the right entrepreneurial atmosphere that is supportive of entrepreneurial activities and developing a dynamic curriculum is an essential ingredient in preparing smart entrepreneurs. It is therefore recommended that:

i. Varsities should institute faculty/departmental officers on entrepreneurship, whose duties will include advising students on venture creation and also establish a bi-annual or annual entrepreneurship competition in order to sharpen students' entrepreneurial awareness and intention.

ii. Varsities should go beyond teaching the theoretical aspects of entrepreneurship and collaborate with private organizations and successful business persons, to develop curriculums that will effectively arm graduates with entrepreneurial skills, abilities and competencies required to thrive in the real business world.

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