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Integration of Vocapreneurship Skills in Entrepreneurship Development Programme of Graduates in the 21st Century

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Abstract

This study was designed to ascertain the effect of integrating vocapreneurship skills in entrepreneurship development programme of graduate in the 21st century. Two research questions were stated to guide the study and two null hypotheses were postulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance. Related literatures were reviewed. Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The study was conducted in Calabar Municipality, Cross River State. Population of the study consisted of 105 staff of which 92 staff were sampled using Taro Yamane formula. Instrument used for data collection was a 20-item structured questionnaire. The instrument was validated by three experts. Reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.74. Independent t-test was used to test hypotheses at 0.05 significance level. Findings showed significant difference in mean responses of lecturers and vocational training partners of University of Calabar (UNICAL) Entrepreneurship Development Centre (EDC) on the effect of integrating programme-centric vocational skills in entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL on graduate employment readiness in the 21st century. It also shows significant difference in mean responses of lecturers and vocational training partners of UNICAL EDC on the effect of integrating programme-centric entrepreneurial skills in entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL on graduate employment readiness in the 21st century. It was therefore recommended that programme-centric vocational skills should be integrated into entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL for graduate employment readiness in the 21st century. Lastly, it was recommended that programme-centric entrepreneurial skills should be integrated into entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL for graduate employment readiness in the 21st century.

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Keywords

Vocational skills, Entrepreneurship skills, Vocapreneurship skills, Academic programme, Employment Readiness

Introduction

Integration of vocapreneurship skills is the act of forming, coordinating, or blending it into a functioning or unified whole. So, to *integrate* vocapreneurship skills is to make it part of a whole. Singh and Pal Singh (2022) asserted that skills are widely used as basic elements which contribute to the sustainable development of the country. Groves (2019) contended that skill is an ability and capacity acquired through deliberate, systematic; and sustained effort to smoothly and adaptively carry out complex activities or job functions involving ideas (cognitive skills), things (technical skills), and /or people (interpersonal skills). As a term, “*vocapreneurship*” is coined from two words - *vocation* and *entrepreneurship* by Mfam and Anagbogu (2023).

Conyers (2004) posited that the familiar term “vocation,” whether used in religious or secular contexts, is rooted in the Latin word *vocatio*, meaning a “call,” a “summons,” or an “invitation”. Khrypko et al. (2023) and Tyndale University College and Seminary (2024) agreed that vocation comes from the Latin word for “a call”, the idea being that someone is calling us to a particular path. So, vocation is that balance between a career suited to you and where service is calling you - a strong feeling of suitability for a particular career or occupation while *entrepreneurship* is the process of using initiative to transform business concept to new venture, diversify existing venture or enterprise to high growing venture potentials (United Nations Industrial Development Organization [UNIDO], 1999) constitute the amalgam - “*vocapreneurship*”. Mfam and Anagbogu (2023) posited that vocapreneurship skills are practical skills developed within a vocation, trade, profession or discipline with an entrepreneurial intention to functionalize/demonstrate the skills for economic gains. Established theories show vocational skills as practical skills that help an individual become proficient in a vocation, trade or profession (Indeed, 2013) while entrepreneurship skills are those that facilitate initiation, establishment and running a self-owned business venture (Agogbua & Mgbatogu, 2024).

Broadly, vocapreneurship skills can be construed as precise skill-sets comprising of demonstrable psychomotor ability (vocational skills application) (Hill et al., 2018) and reflective/creative cognitive ability (entrepreneurial skills application) (Singh & Pal Singh, 2022) needed to function within

the entrepreneurial domains of: (a) venture opportunity recognition and profiling within acquired skill-sets in an academic programme, (b) venture idea identification/generation and profiling within acquired skill-sets in an academic programme, (c) venture creation and development within acquired skill-sets in an academic programme, (d) venture nurturing and management within acquired skill-sets in an academic programme; and (e) venture growth and sustainability within acquired skill-sets in an academic programme (Mfam & Anagbogu, 2023). The acquisition of vocapreneurship skills for the ultimate reduction of graduate unemployment should be central in the implementation of entrepreneurship development programme of University of Calabar (UNICAL), Calabar.

An entrepreneurship development programme is an innovative educational initiative to provide aspiring entrepreneurs with the knowledge, skills, and resources required to establish and manage a thriving business (Atria University, 2024). These programmes offer a holistic and comprehensive curriculum that includes instructional sessions, interactive workshops, mentorship opportunities, networking events, and access to financial support and resources.

UNICAL is among the universities in Nigeria who are pursuing the entrepreneurship development mandate for students’ self-reliance upon leaving school. UNICAL established its Entrepreneurship Development Centre (EDC) in 2011, following the directive of National Universities Commission (NUC) for tertiary educational institutions to build fit-for-purpose Entrepreneurship Development Centers (EDC) for training undergraduates to be creative, innovative and job creators as against being job seekers. This is meant to add value to the existing academic programmes that have left Nigerian graduates unemployed or unemployable by acquainting students across academic faculties to become armed with the necessary ideas, imagination strategies, skills and techniques needed to become employed (self-employment as entrepreneurs or paid employment as employees with entrepreneurial value) or employment ready. Self-employment refers to working for oneself rather than working for a specific employer who pays them a salary (University of Edinburgh, 2024) while paid-employment is the opposite of self-employment. It is the state of working for others to get paid for your services. According to International Labour Organization (ILO, 2018), paid employment jobs (those jobs held

by employees), particularly continuous and full time paid employment jobs, are known as the standard form of employment, marked by a subordinate and direct relationship between the employer and the employee and the fact that the remuneration is independent from the revenue of the corresponding economic unit. Further, Deel (2024) upheld that employment (job) readiness refers to the extent to which an individual possesses the necessary skills, knowledge, and attributes to effectively undertake a specific role or occupation. It encompasses the core, functional, and technical competencies required for a position. The preparation of graduates for labour market readiness is one of the principal considerations for the development of academic programmes.

An academic programme is a set of courses and other study requirements that, on successful completion, lead to the award of an academic degree (United Arab Emirate University [UAE], 2024) or certificate. Academic programmes are designed to enable students to achieve comprehensive educational outcomes through dedicated faculty guidance and within a holistic educational context. Therefore, any skill development programme that is based on academic programmes offered for learning is academic programme-centric. Accordingly, entrepreneurial skills developed through entrepreneurship development programmes of UNICAL should be tied to the academic programmes of the institution for long-run benefit to students.

UNICAL grew out of the Calabar campus of University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN). In April 1975, the Federal Military Government of Nigeria announced the establishment of seven new Universities. UNICAL was one of the seven (University of Calabar [UNICAL], 2023). UNICAL aims to produce high quality manpower with theoretical and practical learning exposure and entrepreneurial skill acquisition for self-reliance. A fundamental goal of education is to equip students with the knowledge and skills necessary to think critically, solve complex problems, and succeed in the 21st century society and economy (Fin et al., 2014).

The 21st century is the current century in the *Anno Domini* or Common Era, in accordance with the Gregorian calendar. Hun School of Princeton (HSP, 2019) argued that 21st-century skills-based education recognizes that tomorrow's jobs do not exist yet - and that the way to prepare students for the "real world" is changing. Hence, the need for multi-dimensional approach to learning experience. A 21st-century skills-based curriculum pivots away from content acquisition and rote memorization to focus on the

skills and abilities that will best serve our generation of young minds. This should be the charge for entrepreneurship lecturers and vocational training partners (VTPs). VTPs are vocational skills training specialists drawn from the private sector to lead the practical scholarship of learning-by-doing in UNICAL EDC (University of Calabar Entrepreneurship Development Centre [UNICAL EDC], 2024). Lecturers and VTPs have responsibility to effectively implement UNICAL EDC entrepreneurship programmes. Where the entrepreneurship development programmes are ill-implemented by them, the supposed and desired entrepreneurial skills would not be acquired. This would still force students to continue learning theoretical contents that require memorization of concepts only. This would make students not to have skills with which to function upon leaving school with the attendant consequences of drifting to drug abuse, criminality, banditry among other social vices that negatively impact on humanity and society.

The findings of this study would be beneficial to the Federal Ministry of Education (FME), Tertiary Institutions Trust Fund (TETFUND), National Universities Commission (NUC), Nigerian Universities, university graduates, parents/guardians; and the society at large. The findings of this study would assist FME, TETFUND and NUC formulate policies for the implementation of and provide direct interventions on entrepreneurship development programme towards initiatives what would truly guarantee student's entrepreneurial self-reliance upon leaving school. Universities would be empowered to give graduates functional and relevant entrepreneurial skills training that would enable them sustain themselves and contribute to national development.

On the part of the graduates, the findings of this study would help the relevant institutions of government such as FME, TETFUND, NUC and universities to prepare them to be entrepreneurially independent as they leave school. This would help them to create jobs for themselves as opposed to wasting their precious time seeking for white collar jobs that are diminishing geometrically. Parents would find their wards being independently productive for their good and the good of society. It is against this background that this study was designed to ascertain the effect of integrating vocapreneurship skills in the entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL on graduate in the 21st century.

Statement of the problem

One of the national educational goals is the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and

competencies as equipment for the individual to live in and contribute to the development of the society. To this end, the National Universities Commission (NUC) directed Nigerian Universities to establish Entrepreneurship Development Centres (EDCs) as creative response to high levels of graduate unemployment in Nigeria. With this arrangement, graduates ought to be armed with vocational and entrepreneurial skills to fit into paid jobs or self-employed jobs. This is however not the case currently as most graduates are not engaged by the few available jobs, in some instances, on account of skill mismatch between graduates know and what the employers want. Again, most graduates do not have what it takes to create self-employment hence, the massive graduate unemployment situation in Nigeria.

The cause of the increased rate of unemployment among graduates is manifested in the lack of functional education that will bring about the training of the abundant human resources to be creative, innovative, entrepreneurial and business opportunity seekers that will transform opportunities and material resources into goods and services. The entrepreneurship development vision of NUC for students is an ambitious effort to address these concerns and therefore focuses on reducing graduate unemployment through entrepreneurial skills development. Students' academic empowerment does not match programme-specific vocational and entrepreneurial skills to surety the attainment of the desired reduction in graduate unemployment rate. The fear of rising graduate unemployment should be sufficient caution. Deliberate action should be taken to prepare students for self-employment and job creation.

Unemployment as it were, would generally always remain a disaster anywhere and anytime. An idle mind is said to be the devil's workshop. Unemployment has consequences in drug abuse, criminality, banditry, kidnapping among other social vices that negatively impact humanity and society. Integrating vocational entrepreneurship skills training in UNICAL's entrepreneurship development programmes has strong potency to reduce graduate unemployment and check the identified vices. This defines the need for this study.

Research questions

The following research questions were stated to guide the study:

1. what is the effect of integrating programme-centric vocational skills in entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL on

graduate employment readiness in the 21st century?

2. what is the effect of integrating programme-centric entrepreneurial skills in entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL on graduate employment readiness in the 21st century?

Hypothesis

The following null hypotheses were formulated for the study and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

H_{01} – there is no significant difference in the mean responses of entrepreneurship lecturers and vocational training partners of UNICAL EDC on the effect of integrating programme-centric vocational skills in entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL on graduate employment readiness in the 21st century.

H_{02} – there is no significant difference in the mean responses of entrepreneurship lecturers and vocational training partners of UNICAL EDC on the effect of integrating programme-centric entrepreneurial skills in entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL on graduate employment readiness in the 21st century.

Design and methods

This research study adopted the descriptive survey design because data obtained came from lecturers and vocational training partners' opinion. Osuala (2001) posited that a survey research focuses on people, their opinions, attitudes, motivation and behaviour. Calabar Municipal Council was the area of study.

The population of the study consisted of 105 staff (45 lecturers teaching entrepreneurship skills and 60 vocational training partners (VTPs) teaching vocational skills) in the Entrepreneurship Development Centre of UNICAL (University of Calabar Entrepreneurship Development Centre, 2024). The sample of this study was 92 staff (40 lecturers and 52 Vocational Training Partners). The sample was determined using Taro Yamane formula given as: $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$. Where: n = the sample size, N = the finite population, e = level of significance (i.e., limit of tolerable or allowable error); and 1 = unity (a constant). Taro Yamane formula was used to determine the sample size because the population was known. This decision is supported by Uzoagulu (1998).

A researchers-made, 4-point Likert-type scale of 20 questionnaire items, divided into three sections lettered A – C was designed and used for data collection in this study. A 4-point scale was adopted because Dolnicar and Grun (2007) noted that it is easily completed and faster to respond to than scales above four (4) points. The respondents responded to all the sections of the instrument by ticking the boxes and columns provided for their independent responses. Section A sought information on the bio-data/background of the respondents. The section contained three items numbered i – Engagement status (Lecturer or VTP), ii – Instructional component taught (Theory or Practical); and iii – Instructional experience (5 yrs, 10 yrs or Above 10 yrs). Section B was meant to collect information on the effect of integrating vocational skills of students’ specific programmes in the entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL on graduate employment readiness in the 21st century. The section contained 11 questionnaire items numbered 1 – 11. Section C was designed to gather information on the effect of integrating entrepreneurial skills of students’ specific programmes in the entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL on graduate employment readiness in the 21st century. The section contained 9 questionnaire items numbered 12 – 20.

The instrument was face validated by three experts - one from Educational Foundations and two

Results

Table 1: Independent t-Test of mean responses of entrepreneurship lecturers and vocational training partners (VTPs) of UNICAL EDC on the effect of integrating programme-centric vocational skills in entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL on graduate employment readiness in the 21st century

Variables	N	X	SD	t-cal	Decision
Lecturers	36	41.60	9.43		7.53 Sig
VTPs	47	33.30	16.22		

$P < 0.05$; $df = 81$; critical t value = 3.42

In Table 1, the critical value of t with 82 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance is 3.42. Since the calculated value of t is 7.53, being more than the critical value, we reject the null hypothesis (H_{01}). That is, significant difference exists in the mean responses of entrepreneurship lecturers and vocational training partners of UNICAL EDC on the effect of integrating programme-centric

from Management Science Faculties of University of Calabar, Calabar. Furthermore, the internal consistency of the instrument was tested through Cronbach Alpha Reliability Test. The purpose of this was to measure the degree of internal consistency. The test yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.74 indicating that the instrument was highly reliable. The instrument was administered to both groups of the sample size in the study area by the researchers and four research assistants. Out of the 92 questionnaires administered, 83 were returned making a return rate of 90%.

Data for this study were analyzed using inferential statistical tool. Independent t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of statistical significance. Percentage was also used to report the demographic characteristic of respondents. Percentage was used because Gupta (2011) identified percentage as one of the units of statistical analysis and interpretation which facilitate comparison. In computing the weighted mean of the questionnaire items, the response scale and their corresponding values were as follows: Strongly Agreed (SA) - 4 points, Agreed (A) - 3 points, Disagreed (D) – 2 points, and Strongly Disagreed (SD) - 1 point. The mean of the values of the 4-point Likert-type scale which constituted the decision point was 2.

vocational skills in entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL on graduate employment readiness in the 21st century. This implies that integration of academic programme-centric vocational skills in entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL would affect graduate employment readiness in the 21st century.

In line with this finding, Budría and Telhado-Pereira (2008) found that vocational training may importantly improve the labour market prospects of training completers, providing job-related skills, enhancing productivity and bringing new employment opportunities. There is evidence also in support of this finding pointing to the beneficial effects of training activities on unemployment duration, productivity and wages as seen in the studies of Richardson and van den Berg (2001), Conti (2005); and Van Reenan et al. (2006). Studies by Schmillen and Bargain (2014), Ogunyinka et al. (2017) and Olaniran and Adeoti (2019) made profound findings to the effect that vocational training significantly improves youths' employability skills; vocational training programmes can significantly improve youths' employability and entrepreneurial skills; and vocational training

programs can improve youths' employability and increase their chances of finding employment. The studies also revealed that vocational training programmes that incorporate on-the-job training and practical experience are more effective than those that rely solely on theoretical knowledge.

Among the literature reviewed, some studies disagreed with this finding of this study. For instance, evaluation studies of public training programmes in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries evidenced in the works of Fitzenberger and Prey (2000), Martin and Grubb (2001); and Machin and Vignoles (2005), reported that adult and vocational training have little directly measurable labour market effects, failing to attract earnings returns and new employment opportunities.

Hypothesis 2

Table 2: Independent t-Test of mean responses of entrepreneurship lecturers and vocational training partners (VTPs) of UNICAL EDC on the effect of integrating programme-centric entrepreneurial skills in entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL on graduate employment readiness in the 21st century.

Variables	N	X	SD	t-cal	Decision
Lecturers	36	65.40	22.43	5.42	Sig
VTPs	47	56.89	28.62		

P < 0.05; df = 81; critical t value = 3.42

In Table 2, the critical value of *t* with 82 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance is 3.42. Since the calculated value of *t* is 5.42, being more than the critical value, we reject the null hypothesis (H_{01}). That is, significant difference exists in the mean responses of entrepreneurship lecturers and vocational training partners of UNICAL EDC on the effect of integrating programme-centric entrepreneurial skills in entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL on graduate employment readiness in the 21st century. This implies that integration of programme-centric entrepreneurial skills in entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL would affect graduate employment readiness in the 21st century.

Ekpe et al. (2015) agreed with this finding as their study found a significant relationship between entrepreneurial skills acquisition and self employment practice. Also, the result of Adetoya et al. (2015)'s study indicated that entrepreneurial

education empowered these graduates to start up business of their own; and that skills acquisition improved performance of entrepreneurs. It further showed that there is a significant difference between University attended and employment generation amongst graduate entrepreneurs. Still in support of this finding of this study, the study of Chiekiezie et al. (2016) revealed that acquisition of entrepreneurial skills is of immense importance in making jobs available in Benin City. In their studies, Ekpe and Razak (2016) found that entrepreneurship skills acquisition had a significant relationship with enterprise creation.

The study of Igbongidi (2017) also aligned with this finding as it found that entrepreneurship education influences job creation, and concluded that entrepreneurship education can reduce unemployment among business education students in Niger Delta, Nigeria. Further, Afolabi et al. (2017) study found that there is a strong positive relationship

between entrepreneurship education and self-employment initiatives. Again, Muogbo and John-Akamelu (2018) study concluded that youth's entrepreneurship provide a partial solution to employment situation in Nigeria. The finding of the result showed that entrepreneurial education empowered these graduates to start up business of their own; and that skills acquisition improved performance of entrepreneurs. On the flip side of this finding of this study, Ugwoke et al (2014)'s study revealed that there was no discernible difference between male and female teachers in terms of the advantages of entrepreneurship instruction in Enugu State's senior secondary schools.

Conclusion

The integrating of programme-centric vocational skills in entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL would have profound gainful effect on graduate employment readiness in the 21st century. This position is robustly supported in literature as evidenced in empirical results established in this study. This curriculum innovation would also trigger and promote academic programme-based vocational critical thinking, creativity, problem-solving and innovation. NUC (2023) identified critical thinking, problem-solving and creativity as part of 21st century skills for entrepreneurship programme. The vocationalization of the content of entrepreneurship development studies in UNICAL along the tin line of specific academic programmes would sustain students' interest in university-based entrepreneurship development programme. Consequently, students' entrepreneurial minds set would be opened and ready for learning-through-entrepreneurship. At the end, students would be re-orientated towards a job creation mind-set rather than the fixed attitude of job seeking upon graduation.

Again, the integrating of programme-centric entrepreneurial skills would affect graduate employment readiness in the 21st century. It would enable students master entrepreneurship knowledge within the vocational skill-sets embodied in their academic programmes and graduate with refined business ideas or actual startups. It would also bring about graduate competence and confidence in venture creation within the vocational skill-sets offered in their academic programmes. Students' exposure to entrepreneurship knowledge and vocational environment in their academic programmes would ultimately manifest in their strong desire to create entrepreneurial ventures. Students would deploy their entrepreneurial competencies to foster paradigm shift

needed for personal growth, social transformation and wealth creation.

Recommendations

Having completed the study and findings derived, it is therefore recommended, from the findings that:

1. Programme-centric vocational skills should be integrated in the entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL to facilitate graduate employment readiness in the 21st century.
2. Programme-centric entrepreneurial skills should be integrated in the entrepreneurship development programme of UNICAL to facilitate graduate employment readiness in the 21st century.

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