

## **Fostering Compassionate Communities through Entrepreneurship Skill Development: A Study of Final-Year Economics Education Students in South East Nigeria**

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### **Research Domains**

Employability, enterprise and graduate careers (EE)

### **Abstract**

This study examined the entrepreneurship skill development needs of final-year Economics Education students in Federal Universities in South East Nigeria, within the context of fostering compassionate and collegial learning communities in higher education. Using a descriptive survey design, data were collected from 120 students via a validated questionnaire ( $\alpha = 0.862$ ). Findings showed that while students demonstrated strengths in leadership, communication, financial literacy, and teamwork, they lacked critical skills such as creativity, decision-making, problem-solving, initiative, and opportunity recognition. These gaps highlight the need for a more empathetic and community-focused curriculum that supports collaborative learning, real-world engagement, and peer mentoring. The study advocates integrating compassion-driven entrepreneurship training into Economics Education to promote not only employability but also shared responsibility, innovation, and collegial support in higher education spaces

### **Full paper**

#### Introduction

The growing crisis of graduate unemployment and underemployment in Nigeria highlights a pressing need for higher education institutions to respond with compassion-driven, community-focused strategies that equip students with real-world skills. Entrepreneurship education, when framed within a collegial and inclusive learning community, offers a pathway to empower students for self-reliance, innovation, and sustainable livelihoods. Particularly in Economics Education, where theory meets practice, there exists an opportunity to bridge knowledge with entrepreneurial competence.

While universities have integrated entrepreneurship into the curriculum, many students—especially those in Economics Education—remain inadequately prepared for self-

employment. This disconnect suggests a need to reevaluate whether current teaching practices and learning environments foster the entrepreneurial mindsets and practical skills that students require. These include creativity, opportunity recognition, problem-solving, risk-taking, and adaptability.

This study, therefore, investigates the entrepreneurship skill needs of final-year Economics Education students in federal universities in South East Nigeria. It also examines gender-related variations in skill acquisition and identifies curriculum gaps. The aim is to promote a more collegial, inclusive, and competence-driven approach to entrepreneurship education that responds meaningfully to students' aspirations, enhances peer learning, and builds resilient academic communities in higher education.

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to explore the entrepreneurial skill needs of final-year Economics Education students across federal universities in South East Nigeria. Rooted in a collegial and inclusive approach, the research involved 120 students, randomly selected from a population of 226 across five states—Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. Data were gathered using a researcher-developed, expert-validated questionnaire titled Entrepreneurship Skills Possessed and Needed of Undergraduate Economics Education Students (ESPNQ), structured into sections on demographic data, entrepreneurship-related course content, skills possessed, and skills needed. The instrument demonstrated strong reliability (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.862). Questionnaire administration was conducted in person with full participation, reflecting strong student engagement. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation), providing insights to inform more compassionate, skill-responsive, and community-minded entrepreneurship education within higher education contexts.

## Discussion

The study identified that the Economics Education curriculum in South East Federal Universities embeds several entrepreneurship-relevant courses. These include Introduction to Entrepreneurship, Business Management, Business Finance, Labour Economics, Development Economics, and Monetary Economics. The presence of such courses reflects the interdisciplinary structure of the curriculum, integrating principles from economics, finance, and management to support entrepreneurial learning. Courses like Economics of Planning and Structure of the Nigerian Economy help students contextualize entrepreneurship within the Nigerian economy, while others like Business Development and Labour Economics support practical business understanding. These findings are consistent with Omeke et al. (2023) and Abusomwan (2017), who acknowledged that Economics Education promotes awareness of entrepreneurial practices and concepts.

Findings revealed that students possess a broad spectrum of entrepreneurial skills, including leadership, goal-setting, communication, planning, teamwork, adaptability, customer relations, and financial literacy. This outcome suggests that the curriculum offers foundational exposure to both theoretical and practical competencies. Such skills are vital

for entrepreneurial success and reflect the influence of economics education in nurturing versatile graduates. These findings are supported by Nwafor et al. (2021), Sheidu et al. (2022), and Nji (n.d.), who emphasized that Economics Education fosters creativity, managerial, and technical competencies in students.

It was also revealed that a notable gender disparity was observed, with female students demonstrating higher mean ratings in entrepreneurship skills possession compared to their male counterparts. This may be attributed to differences in learning styles, communication strengths, and engagement in collaborative activities. Prior research by Okeke et al. (2016) and Nji (n.d.) also reported similar gender differences in entrepreneurial competencies, especially in innovative and interpersonal skills. This highlights the need for gender-responsive pedagogy that supports skill acquisition across diverse student profiles.

The research also found that despite the skills already acquired, students expressed the need for further development in areas such as creativity, decision-making, problem-solving, critical thinking, internet trading, risk-taking, and opportunity recognition. These competencies are crucial for adapting to the evolving demands of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The identified gaps suggest that while foundational training exists, more targeted efforts are needed to equip students for complex entrepreneurial challenges. These results align with prior studies by Aladejare & Oluremi (2020), Ajani & Olaniyan (2021), and Okoro (2021), which emphasized innovation, marketing, and digital entrepreneurship as critical skill areas.

The findings also revealed that male students reported a higher perceived need for entrepreneurship skills than their female counterparts, indicating heightened awareness of personal gaps and career readiness needs. This perception underscores gender-based differences in self-assessment and motivation toward entrepreneurship, warranting further exploration.