



Impact of entrepreneurial and digital skills on youth empowerment in the North West of Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper was undertaken as a result of the present challenges facing youths of Nigeria especially those from the north west region of the country. Empowering the youths with majority of population with necessary skills in entrepreneurship and digital industries would greatly help in minimizing or reducing the such challenges of youth unemployment, illicit drug peddling and other crimes in the society largely attributed to youths. The study explicitly designed to investigate the effect of entrepreneurship skills and digital skills on youth empowerment within the North-West Region of Nigeria. The study distributed a total of 280 questionnaires but was able to have 271 completely filled and returned from the students of Kaduna State University using the main campus of the institution. The study adopted a survey research design. Data were mostly gotten from the primary source using structured questionnaires. The study has found that proxies of entrepreneurship skills comprising of opportunity recognition skill and risk management skill were positive and significant and similarly digital skills proxied by digital marketing skill and e-commerce skill were also positive and significant in influencing the youth empowerment of the North West Nigerian youths. The study concluded that entrepreneurship skills and digital skills are necessary tools that agencies of government within the North West Nigeria could use to harness and enhance the empowerment of youths within the region.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship skills, Digital skills, Youth empowerment

Introduction

The number of youths in the world keep growing. There were 1.2 billion youths ranging between the age of 15 to 24 years worldwide in 2015, representing one out of every six people worldwide (ILO, 2017) as cited in (Anikeze & Okpalaibekwe, 2024). Empowering this category of the world population has become a need for any country that wish to achieve greater height in the society. The number of young people is projected to rise by 7% to about 1.3 billion by 2030, a year designed for the sustainable development objectives. When

avail with the information and chances required to succeed, youth can be a valuable energy for growth. Particularly, young people should have the skills and knowledge necessary to contribute to a prolific economy, and they must have access to a labour market that will allow them to join its workforce. The National Bureau of Statistics [NBS] (2022) clearly stated that youth empowerment has become a critical issue in Nigeria, where over 60% of the population is under the age of 25. Despite this demographic advantage, Nigerian youths face

insistent challenges such as unemployment, underemployment, and limited access to opportunities for personal and professional growth. As a result, embracing entrepreneurship and digital literacy have emerged as vital pathways for equipping young people with the competencies required to create and sustain economic opportunities in a rapidly evolving digital economy.

Meanwhile, entrepreneurship skills such as opportunity assessment, business planning, risk management, and innovation have been recognized as essential tools for fostering self-reliance and job creation among youth (Ezeani, 2018). The development of the zeal to start up entrepreneurial activities by youths will go a long way in contributing to youth empowerment and by extension reducing or minimizing youth related crimes in the society.

Furthermore, digital skills, including proficiency in information and communication technologies (ICT), digital marketing, and e-commerce, are increasingly indispensable in a world where technology is a driver of economic and social transformation (World Bank, 2021). The quick advancement of information and technology can offer a chance for societal improvement. Economic advancement, social growth, and youth empowerment may be suitable media in the pursuit of this goal. Nevertheless, not all facets of society have yet benefited from the expansion of technology and information infrastructure, especially the younger population. Because youth empowerment can be facilitated by the employment of effective technology and knowledge (Sugiono, 2020) as cited in (Setiadi et al., 2023). Together, these skill sets not only to enhance employability but also enable youths to participate meaningfully in the digital and entrepreneurial systems both locally and globally.

Moreover, the systemic challenges hindering the achievement of the government intentions for is still at play up till today. Given the history of government intervention towards uplifting the Nigerian youths which can be seen thus:

present and past government had channeled huge resources to youth empowerment programmes in Nigeria, notable among these youth empowerment programs include; N-power, Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (Youwin); Tony Elumelu Foundation Entrepreneurship Program; Youth Empowering People (YEP); Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS); African Youth Empowerment Nigeria (AYEN); TraderMoni; Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture in Nigeria (YISA); Presidential Youth Entrepreneurship Support (P-YES); Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative (YEDI) (Babalola et al., 2015).

In spite of all the above efforts and programmes, they are being challenged most which had greatly undermined the expected success of these Nigerian youth empowerment initiatives. Limited access to resources is a significant obstacle to youth empowerment initiatives in Nigeria. Mostly, young people, particularly those living in rural areas, do not have access to essential resources such as training facilities, mentorship programs, and financial assistance. This limited access to resources hampers their ability to obtain the requisite abilities and knowledge required for both professional and personal development. Secondly, cultural and societal norms can also hinder the efficacy of youth empowerment initiatives. In some cases, traditional gender roles and societal expectations may discourage young people, especially girls, from participating in these programs. Equally, cultural barriers may prevent organizations from effectively reaching and engaging with the target audience (James, 2019). Thirdly, inadequate government support is another factor that contributes to the difficulties Nigerian youth empowerment initiatives confront. Insufficient funding and lack of policy implementation can hinder the growth and sustainability of these initiatives. Without proper government support, organizations struggle to scale their operations and make a meaningful influence on the young people's lives. Lastly, a lack of awareness and understanding of the significance of youth

empowerment initiatives is 196. another significant challenge. Many young people and their families may not be aware of the benefits these programs offer or may not prioritize their participation. Raising awareness and promoting the importance of youth empowerment initiatives is crucial in overcoming this hurdle (James, 2019).

In Nigeria, efforts to mix entrepreneurship education and digital training into national policy have gained momentum. However, there remains a gap in understanding how these initiatives translate into tangible outcomes for youth empowerment, particularly in terms of economic independence, social inclusion, and innovation potential. The study's goal is to investigate the degree to which entrepreneurship and digital skills contribute to youth empowerment in Nigeria, with a focus on identifying key barriers, enablers, and the role of policy interventions.

Objectives

This study's main goal is to look into the effects of entrepreneurship and digital skills on youth empowerment. The study sampled a total of 280 students of Kaduna State University, Kaduna, Nigeria for the purpose of gathering data through structured questionnaires. The specific objectives include to:

- 1) analyze the effects of opportunity recognition skill on youth empowerment in the North-West of Nigeria.
- 2) examine the effects of risk management skill on youth empowerment in the North-west of Nigeria.
- 3) examine how digital marketing expertise affects youth empowerment in Nigeria's North-West.
- 4) examine the impact of e-commerce skill on youth empowerment in the North west of Nigeria.
- 5) Converting the objectives of the study to hypothesis for testing in the null forms are stated below.

Ho1: opportunity recognition skill has no significant impact on youth empowerment in the North west of Nigeria.

Ho2: risk management skill has no significant impact on youth empowerment in the North west of Nigeria.

Ho3: digital marketing skill has no significant impact on youth empowerment in the North west of Nigeria.

Ho4: e-commerce skill has no significant impact on youth empowerment in the North west of Nigeria.

Material And Methods

Youth Empowerment

Empowering the youths can come in different forms such as educational empowerment, psychological empowerment, economic empowerment and civic empowerment. According to Babalola et al. (2015), empowerment can be defined as a means of encouraging or supporting self-employment. Viewed from another dimension, empowerment can be summed up as growing in the psychological, educational, economic and political strength of any human being or groups. Furthermore, according to Anikeze et al. (2024), empowerment is one way to guarantee economic progress and lessen poverty.

Digital Skills and Leadership Skills

Van Laar et al. (2017) defined digital skills as the capacity to proficiently access and handle information using communication applications, digital devices and networks. The digital skills are varied as can be seen from the objectives of this study, youths can acquire digital skills in the form of digital marketing ability, cybersecurity awareness, data analytics, coding and programming and information literacy. The capacity to comprehend and use information from a variety of computer-accessible sources is another aspect of digital literacy. User's competence in the field of Technology is related to digital literacy, especially information and communication (Bawden, 2001) as cited in (Setiadi et al., 2023). The capacity to make the most of technology in order to promote positive relationships and communication. According to Nurhayati and Falah (2020), digital literacy is a way to improve skills and understanding in

different areas digital devices may be used responsibly and optimally in a various domain in daily life, work, and study as cited in (Setiadi et al., 2023). Entrepreneurship skills on the other hand can be referred according to Morris et al., (2013) as the competencies and mindsets required to start, develop, and manage a business venture. Such entrepreneurship skills are many but can include risk management skills, opportunity recognition skills, business planning skills, and leadership and teamwork skills.

Empirical Review

Anikeze and Okpalaibekwe (2024) investigated in a study titled “digital media tools and youth empowerment in Anambra State”. The study specifically looked at Facebook's influence on the young's access to startup credit facilities and YouTube's impact on young people's acquisition and development of skills. A population of 1,695,000 residents of Onitsha was used and a sample of 400 youths used to collect data for the study via structured questionnaires. According to the study, Facebook and YouTube both significantly improved young empowerment in South East Nigeria.

In another study, titled “youth's digital literacy in the context of community empowerment in an emerging society 5.0”, the study examined the degree of digital literacy among members of the youth organization, known as, Karang Taruna in Cicau Hamlet, Gadobangkong Village in Ngamprah sub-district of West Bandung Regency, West Java Province of Indonesia. The study used case study design and collected information through observations of fifteen organization members, documentation studies, and interviews.

The study found that, the digital literacy of youths in computer operations and information and communication technology were equitably strong, but required prospect for improvement by enhancing infrastructure for a strong internet connections and knowledge on state-of-the-art developments in ICT.

Methodology

This study used structured questionnaires as part of a survey research design on sampled students of Kaduna State University on the main campus. The source of data for the study was mainly from the primary and other secondary sources that helped in building the study literature. Multiple regression was the tool of analyzing the data for the study employing Stata Statistics package Version 13. Other tests were performed to enhance the robustness of the study.

Model Specification

To possibly specify a model for this study where opportunity recognition skill, risk management skill, digital marketing skill and e-commerce skill serve as independent variables proxy for entrepreneurship and digital skills, while youth empowerment serves as dependent variable, can therefore be related as follows:

Model representation,

Let:

YE = youth empowerment (dependent variable)

OPS = opportunity recognition skills (independent variable)

RMS = risk management skills (independent variable)

DMS = digital management skills (independent variable)

ECS = e-commerce skills (independent variable)

ϵ = error term

The model appears as follow:

$$YE = \beta_0 + \beta_1 OPS_{it} + \beta_2 RMS_{it} + \beta_3 DMS_{it} + \beta_4 ECS_{it} + \epsilon \dots \dots \dots \text{equ. I}$$

Where:

β_0 = Intercept

$\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4$ = direct impact of opportunity recognition skill, risk management skill, digital marketing skill and e-commerce skill on the youth empowerment

Results and Findings Discussion

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 below describes the details of the minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation of the data used in this study.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
ORS	271	3.509225	1.179653	1	5
RMS	271	3.04428	1.204111	1	5
DMS	271	2.785978	1.287528	1	5
ECS	271	2.712177	1.296076	1	5

Source: Stata Output, Version 13

Table 1 above shows that ORS has 1 as the minimum and 5 as the maximum. ORS also has a mean of 3.509225 and a standard deviation of 1.179653. The value of the standard deviation of course shows how opportunity recognition skill fluctuates between the minimum and greatest value; a greater standard deviation indicates a greater rate of mean deviation. This result shows that the deviation of the collected data was normal since the value of the standard deviation is lower than the mean in this study. In addition, table 1 shows that RMS has minimum value of 1 and a maximum value of 5. RMS also has a mean of 3.04428 and a standard deviation of 1.204111. This result shows that the deviation of the collected data

was normal since the value of the standard deviation is lower than the mean in this study. More so, table 1 shows that DMS has 1 as the minimum and 5 as the maximum. DMS also has a mean of 2.785978 and a standard deviation of 1.287528. This result shows that the deviation of the collected data was normal since the value of the standard deviation is lower than the mean in this study. Equally, table 1 shows that ECS has 1 as the minimum and 5 as the maximum. ECS also has a mean of 2.712177 and a standard deviation of 1.296076. This result again shows that the deviation of the collected data was normal since the value of the standard deviation is lower than the mean in this study.

Table 2: Correlation Table

Variable	YE	ORS	RMS	DMS	ECS
YE	1.0000				
ORS	0.7500	1.0000			
RMS	0.7307	0.7872	1.0000		
DMS	0.8863	0.7329	0.7252	1.0000	
ECS	0.5415	0.4257	0.4306	0.5067	1.0000

Source: Stata Output, Version 13

Table 2 above shows the connection among the dependent and the independent variables. In addition, it shows the relationships among the independent variables. ORS positively related to YE at 75%, by this it means that the more the skill of opportunity recognition by youths, the higher their empowerment. RMS also related positively to YE at 73.1%, it therefore means that the higher the degree of the risk management skill by youths, the more their likely empowerment. DMS also related positively to YE at 88.6%, this therefore

means that the more the degree of the digital marketing skill, the more the likely their empowerment. In addition, table 2 shows that ECS related positively with YE at 54.2% which signifies that the more the degree of e-commerce skill by youths, the more their level of empowerment.

Multicollinearity test: again, table 2 becomes the reference point as it contains the relationship among all the independent variables. Opportunity recognition skill, risk management skill, digital marketing skill

positively related to e-commerce skill with these values 0.426, 0.431 and 0.507 respectively. In addition, the low correlations

Table 3: Summary of regression results

Variables	Coef.	T	p>[t]
ORS	0.1795	2.41	0.001
RMS	0.0976	1.92	0.056
DMS	0.6882	15.24	0.000
ECS	0.1101	2.46	0.001
R ²			0.8187
Adj R ²			0.8159
F-Sig			0.0000

Source: Stata Output, Version 13

From table 3, it can be seen that all of the descriptive variables have significant impact on youth empowerment at 5% level of significance. Cumulative adjusted R² (0.82) which, as a joint factor of determination, shows how well the explanatory factors account for the overall variation in the dependent variable. It shows that other factors account for the remaining 18%. This means that 82% of the disparity in youth empowerment of North-West Nigeria is caused by opportunity recognition skill, risk management skill, digital marketing skill and e-commerce skill. This further shows that the R² is positive and satisfies the minimum rule of thumb, indicating that the explanatory variables were carefully chosen and mixed.

Because chi-square is the limiting distribution of the T as the denominator degrees of freedom approach infinity after normalization, the T-statistics are the same. Consequently, the study's model was fit, as indicated by the T-statistics of 4,266, which is significant at the five percent level. There is a 95% probability of confidence that the link between the study's variables is not the result of chance when the T-statistic value is statistically significant at the five percent level of significance (0.000).

Test of Hypotheses

Under this section, the investigation conducted on the hypotheses of the study on the impact of some proxy of skills acquisition comprising opportunity recognition skill, risk management skill, digital marketing skill and e-commerce

noticed among the independent variables suggest absence of harmful multicollinearity among them since they are all below 0.80.

skill on youth empowerment proxy educational empowerment, and social empowerment of youths of North-West Nigeria. Table 3 displays the regression result that was used to assess the hypotheses.

Decision rule:

The hypotheses would be rejected, if the P-value was less than 0.05 significance level.

Opportunity recognition and youth empowerment: Hypothesis one

H₀₁: opportunity recognition skill does not significantly affect youth empowerment of North-West Nigeria.

opportunity recognition skill is found to be positive and significantly impacted on the empowerment of youths of North West Nigeria at five percent significance level. From table 3, it shows that the t-value for opportunity recognition skill (ORS) is 3.41 and a 0.1795 coefficient value with a significance value of 0.001 at 5% significance level. By this result, it indicates that opportunity recognition skill has positively but significantly impacted on the empowerment of youths of North West Nigeria.

H₀₂: risk management skill does not significantly affect empowerment of youths of North West Nigeria.

Risk management skill is found to be positive and significantly impacted on the empowerment of North West Nigerian youths at five percent significance level. From table 3, it shows that the t-value for risk management skill (RMS) is 1.92 and a coefficient value of 0.097 with a significant value of 0.056 at 5% significance level. By this result, it indicates

that risk management skill has positively but significantly impacted on the empowerment of North West Nigerian youths.

H₀₃: digital marketing skill does not affect the empowerment of North West Nigerian youths. digital marketing skill is found to be positive and significantly impacted on the empowerment of North West Nigerian youths at five percent significance level. From table 3, it shows that the t-value for digital marketing skill (DMS) is 15.24 and a coefficient value of 0.688 with a significant value of 0.000 at 5% significance level. By this result, it indicates that digital marketing skill has positively and significantly affected the empowerment of youths of North West Nigerian.

H₀₄: e-commerce skill does not significantly affect empowerment of North West Nigerian youths. e-commerce skill is found to be negative and significantly impacted on the empowerment of North West Nigerian youths at five percent significance level. From table 3, it shows that the t-value for e-commerce skill (ECS) is 3.46 and a coefficient value of 0.110 with a significant value of 0.001 at 5% significance level. By this result, it indicates that e-commerce skill has positively and significantly affected the empowerment of North West Nigerian youths.

Discussion of Major Findings

The variables used in the study included youth empowerment, opportunity recognition skill, risk management skill, digital marketing skill and e-commerce skill.

$$YE = \alpha + \beta_1ORS + \beta_2RMS + \beta_3DMS + \beta_4ECS + e \dots 2$$

Substituting the variables into the model results as follows:

$$YE = -0.165 + 0.179ORS + 0.098RMS + 0.688DMS + 0.110ECS + 89.55 \dots 3$$

From equation 3, it reveals that every one percent increase in the degree of opportunity recognition skill of North West Nigerian youths, will lead to 17.9 percent increase in their empowerment. Every one percent increase in the degree of risk management skill of North West Nigerian youths, will lead to 9.76 percent increase in their empowerment. Every one percent increase in the degree of

digital marketing skill of North West Nigerian youths, will lead to 68.8 percent increase in their empowerment. In addition, every one percent increase in the degree of e-commerce skill of North West Nigerian youths, will lead to 11.0 percent increase in their empowerment.

Policy implication: from the above findings this study, it implies that alteration of the size or degree of the proxies of entrepreneurship and digital skills can significantly affect the empowerment of youths of North West Nigeria.

Conclusion

The results of this investigation allow for the safe conclusion that entrepreneurship skills and digital skills are very vital and significant to the needed empowerment of the youths of the North West Nigeria. The need to adequately funds and judiciously monitors empowerment programmes targeted at the youths by government agencies within the North West Nigeria will go a long way in boosting participation of youths and reduction of insecurity and other crimes within the region.

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