SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION PROGRAMS AT FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH-EAST NIGERIA: STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING ECONOMIC CHALLENGES

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Abstract

The growing economic challenges in Nigeria has foster sustainability as a critical concern across all sectors of society, including entrepreneurship education. This study investigated the sustainable practices in entrepreneurship education programs at universities towards economic challenges in Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined the need for sustainable practices in entrepreneurship education programs, Strategies for adopting sustainable practices in entrepreneurship education programs and factors influencing the adoption of sustainable practices in entrepreneurship education programs. The study was carried out in federal universities in the South-East. Two hypotheses guided the research. The study adopted a survey research design and was conducted at federal universities in South-East Nigeria. The population for the study was 156 comprising 84 entrepreneurship education lecturers and 72 instructors in south east. A structured questionnaire having 5-points Likert Scale options, consisting of 31 items was used for data collection. Cronbach Alpha reliability technique was used to determine the internal consistency of the items of the instrument, which yielded an overall reliability coefficient of 0.85. The data collected were analysed using the mean and the T-test for testing the hypotheses at a 0.05 level of significance. The result shows that that sustainable practice of entrepreneurship education programs in universities will play a key role in addressing the economic challenges in Nigeria. It was recommended that, the suggested strategies for the sustainable practices should be maintained in entrepreneurship education programs of university.

Keywords: Economic challenges, Entrepreneurship education, Sustainable practices, Federal universities, Nigeria.

Introduction

The interest of every educational program is to ensure that graduates possess the relevant skills and knowledge required for sustainability before graduation. This has led to the continual revision of their curricula to incorporate technological advancements and sustainability (Onuka, 2017). Sustainability according to Ngor & Tambari (2017) is the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainable practice is also referred to as a continuous and progressive increase and expansion of the volume of goods and services provided in each economy with improvement in the social, political and economic life of present as well as future generations. Sustainable practices in education programs are deliberate strategies, policies, and teaching methods that promote long-term quality learning while fostering awareness of environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic resilience.

Entrepreneurship education (EE) is a structured teaching and learning processes designed to equip students with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies necessary to identify business opportunities, develop innovative ideas, and establish or manage enterprises successfully. Entrepreneurship education, especially when coupled with sustainability practices, helps produce graduates who are not only innovators and job-creators but also stewards of social and environmental wellbeing. Research indicates that EE implementing comprehensive sustainability strategies experience benefits such as cost savings, improved institutional

reputation, enhanced student engagement, and stronger community relations (Wals & Jickling, 2002; Holmberg & Samuelsson, 2001, Ajayi & Egunjobi, 2021). The key practices of sustainability among EE programs according to Ajayi & Egunjobi, (2021, Obe, Maureen, & Onah, 2021)) should include sustainability curriculum integration, green campus initiatives, sustainable procurement, community partnerships, and research for sustainability. Lack of entrepreneurship education with sustainability practices in universities has led to process over social and environmental dimensions which in many ways pose serious threats to socio-economic development especially in Nigeria. These threats give way to unemployment, especially among youth, shrinks in public resources, and volatile global markets.

Universities education equipped with EE programs that incorporate sustainable practices are uniquely positioned to mitigate these threats by developing knowledge, skills, and values oriented toward long-term resilience. Sustainable entrepreneurship education programs in universities can help students identify entrepreneurial opportunities that are both economically viable and environmentally or socially responsible. However, integrating sustainability into entrepreneurship education is not without challenges. Research has shown that many EE programs still show unsupportive curricula, teaching methods, and institutional policies, funding, lack of faculty expertise, regulatory and stakeholder partnerships which hamper effective implementation. (Ajayi & Olutayo, 2018; World Bank, 2017). Adding to this, Afolabi, (2022) maintained that Nigeria universities still face numerous challenges that hinder its effective sustainability in the face of economic challenges such as inadequate funding, outdated infrastructure, shortage of qualified instructors, and limited industry partnerships. Adding to the challenges, Zint et al., 2018 noted that inconsistent leadership commitment, fragmented implementation strategies, and the complexity of interdisciplinary collaboration should be taken into consideration. These have in one way or the other contribute to disparities in educational quality and insufficient sustainability of EE education graduates across the country.

Addressing these challenges is crucial for maximizing the potential impact of sustainable practices on entrepreneurship education programs in universities. Ige, (2018) is of the view that there should be more focus on enhancing funding mechanisms, improving infrastructure, strengthening industry-academic partnerships. Ajayi & Olutayo, 2018; World Bank, 2017), maintained that institutional barriers, limited resources, inadequate faculty training, and lack of awareness should be investigated. Adoption of sustainable practices in EE education according to UNESCO, (2019) enhances the quality of education and contributes to broader societal goals such as environmental stewardship, resource efficiency, and social equity. Ogbuanya (2020) maintained that integrating sustainability practices into educational missions fosters a generation of environmentally conscious and economically viable graduates. (FRN 2013, UNESCO, 2019) also stated that integration of sustainability across all levels of education creates the transformative potential in addressing global challenges.

Ajayi & Egunjobi, (2021) narrated some issues that will boost entrepreneurship education sustainability to including strategic interventions and collaborative efforts among stakeholders and the need for continuous professional development among instructors. It is also recommended that Innovations such as cross-sector partnerships, student-led sustainability initiatives, and sustainability-focused professional development should be maintained to overcome the challenges and promote EE sustainability. This research therefore set to identify the sustainable practices of EE programs of universities amidst economic challenges in Nigeria. This inquiry is critical not only for higher education institutions but also for policymakers and practitioners seeking to build more equitable, resilient, and sustainable economies.

Statement of Problem

Entrepreneurship education (EE) in universities is structured to equip students with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies necessary to sustain them in trade after graduation. (EE) programs is designed to integrate green campus initiatives, sustainable

procurement, community partnerships, and research for sustainability. However, lots of threats have been observed in the economic, social and environmental developments of Nigeria indicating the insufficiency of the program. These threats give way to unemployment, especially among the products of the (EE) programs. This according to this study is attributed to insufficient sustainable practices of Entrepreneurship Education (EE) in universities. Hence this study investigates sustainable practices in entrepreneurship education programs in universities towards economic challenges in Nigeria

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the needs for sustainable practices in entrepreneurship education programs?
2. What are the strategies for adopting sustainable practices in entrepreneurship education programs?
3. What are the factors hindering the adoption of sustainable practices in entrepreneurship education programs?

Hypotheses

Ho_1 There is no significant difference between university entrepreneurship education lecturers and instructors regarding the need for sustainable practices.

Ho_2 There is no significant difference between university entrepreneurship education lecturers and instructors regarding the strategies for adopting sustainable practices.

Ho_3 There is no significant difference between university entrepreneurship education lecturers and instructors regarding the factors hindering the adoption of sustainable practices in entrepreneurship education programs

Materials and Methods

Design for the Study

Area of the Study

The study was carried out in the federal universities in Southeastern, Nigeria. There are five federal universities offering entrepreneurship education in south east as against the state and private Universities that are few that offer entrepreneurship education within the south east zone which makes it convincing for the study.

Population and Sample

The population was made up of 156 comprising of 84 entrepreneurship education lecturers and 72 entrepreneurship education instructors from the five federal universities offering entrepreneurship education in southeast. There was no sampling since the population is of manageable size.

Instrument for Data Collection and Study Procedure

A structured questionnaire consisting of 31 items made up of 12 needs, 10 strategies and 9 factors all having 5-points Likert Scale options was used for data collection. The instrument was developed through literature review and based on the objectives of the study with cutoff point of 3.50. The instrument was validated by three experts from ITE UNN. The experts validated the clarity, relevance and wordings of the instrument while their comments were used to produce the final copy of the instrument. The Cronbach Alpha method was used to test reliability and an overall reliability coefficient of 0.85 was obtained.

The data was collected by the researcher with the help of a research assistant. Out of 156 copies of the questionnaire administered, only 150 copies were retrieved giving a 96% return rate.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions and t-test was used to test the hypothesis at a 0.05 level of significance. Any mean value that is greater than or equal to 3.50 was accepted while mean values less than 3.50 were rejected. However, the null hypothesis was accepted if the p-value is greater than 0.05 level of

significance, but the null hypothesis was rejected if the p-value is less than 0.05 level of significance.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study are presented in the following tables obtained from analysis and the methodologies adopted based on research questions.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on the needs for sustainable practices in entrepreneurship education programs

S/N	Questionnaire Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Remark
1	Sustainable practices significantly contribute to cost reduction in entrepreneurship education programs.	4.15	0.75	Agree
2	Sustainable practices effectively attract funding opportunities for entrepreneurship education projects.	3.95	0.85	Agree
3	Sustainable practices greatly enhance resource efficiency in entrepreneurship education operations.	4.05	0.75	Agree
4	Sustainable practices strongly influence the employability of entrepreneurship education graduates in the job market.	3.75	0.90	Agree
5	Sustainable practices substantially improve the overall reputation of entrepreneurship education programs among stakeholders.	3.55	0.95	Agree
6	Sustainable practices effectively ensure long-term financial stability for entrepreneurship education institutions.	3.95	0.75	Agree
7	Graduates of entrepreneurship education EE programs with sustainable practices have better employment opportunities.	3.95	0.85	Agree
8	Sustainable practices in entrepreneurship education programs enhance the reputation of the university.	4.05	0.75	Agree
9	Adoption of sustainable practices in entrepreneurship education programs improves the overall economic stability of the institution.	4.00	0.87	Agree
10	Adoption of sustainable practices in entrepreneurship education programs leads to long-term financial savings for the university.	3.60	0.77	Agree

S/N	Questionnaire Item	Mean	Standard Deviation	Remark
11	Sustainable practices in entrepreneurship education programs attract more students to the university.	3.90	0.82	Agree
12	Sustainable practices in entrepreneurship education programs create environmentally conscious and economically viable graduates.	3.70	0.67	Agree

The data in Table 1 revealed that all 12 items have their mean values above the cut-off point of 3.50, indicating a general agreement among respondents on the need for sustainable practices in entrepreneurship education programs in Nigerian universities. Additionally, the standard deviations for all 12 items range from 0.75 to 0.95, indicating that the respondents' opinions were relatively consistent and not far from each other.

Table 2: Hypotheses 1

Group	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value	Remark
University EE Lecturers	81	3.97	0.81			
University EE Instructors	69	3.96	0.80	1.05	0.30	Not Significant

Table 2 indicates that university EE Lecturers have a mean score of 3.97, with a standard deviation of 0.81. It also shows that University EE Instructors have a mean score of 3.96, with a standard deviation of 0.80. Also, the hypotheses indicate p-value of 0.30 which shows no significant difference between university EE lecturers and instructors regarding their perceptions of the need for sustainable practice in EE programs. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. Therefore, this analysis suggests that both groups, lecturers and instructors, share similar perceptions regarding the need of sustainable practice in EE of south-eastern universities

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation on the strategies for adopting sustainable practices in entrepreneurship education programs

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Remark
1	Updating entrepreneurship education curriculum to align with industry trends regularly.	4.02	0.20	Agree
2	Participation in professional development programs in entrepreneurship education.	3.80	0.18	Agree
3	Partnering with industry for practical training in entrepreneurship education programs.	4.01	0.15	Agree
4	Participating in community partnerships for practical training in entrepreneurship education programs.	3.60	0.20	Agree
5	Availability of adequate resources and infrastructure to support innovative teaching and learning in entrepreneurship education	3.90	0.25	Agree

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Remark
	programs.			
6	Engaging in research collaborations and grants to enhance resilience and innovation in entrepreneurship education programs.	3.70	0.10	Agree
7	Engaging in research grants writing to enhance financial support for staff and innovation	3.60	0.27	Agree
8	Participating in community partnerships for project collaborations in entrepreneurship education programs.	3.69	0.29	Agree
9	Participating in industrial partnerships for project collaborations in entrepreneurship education programs.	3.70	0.30	Agree
10	Engaging in green campus initiatives to enhance resilience in entrepreneurship education programs.	3.60	0.09	Agree

All items in table 3 have mean values above the cut-off point of 3.50, ranging from 3.60 to 4.20. This suggests that respondents generally perceive these strategies in form of curriculum alignment, faculty development, industry partnerships, community partnership, resource availability, and research collaboration as ways of adopting sustainable practice in entrepreneurship education programs in universities. The standard deviations range from 0.06 to 0.27, indicating relatively consistent opinions among respondents across these items. Therefore, Respondents generally agree on the strategies for adopting sustainable practices in entrepreneurship education programs.

Table 4: Hypotheses 2

Group entrepreneurship education	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-value	p-value	Remark
University EE Lecturers	81	3.95	0.68			
University EE Instructors	69	3.85	0.62	0.95	0.34	NS

Table 4, which expressed hypotheses 2 indicated that university EE Lecturers has a mean score of 3.95, with a standard deviation of 0.68. It also shows that University EE Instructors has a mean score of 3.85, with a standard deviation of 0.62. Also, the t-value of 0.95 and p-value of 0.34 suggest no significant difference between university EE lecturers and instructors regarding their perceptions of strategies for adopting sustainable practices in EE programs. Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis. The results therefore shows that both university EE lecturers and instructors hold similar perceptions regarding the strategies for adopting sustainable practices in EE programs south- eastern universities in Nigeria.

Table 5: Mean and standard deviation on the factors influencing the adoption of sustainable practice in entrepreneurship program

S/N	Questionnaire Items	Mean	Standard Deviation	Remark
1	Leadership support for sustainable practices in EE programs.	4.10	0.90	Agree
2	Availability of funding for sustainable initiatives in EE programs.	3.90	1.20	Agree
3	Awareness and training in sustainable practices.	3.70	1.00	Agree
4	Institutional policies for promoting sustainability in EE.	4.00	2.20	Agree
5	Collaboration with industry to integrate sustainable practices in EE curriculum.	4.20	1.60	Agree
6	Sufficient sustainability-focused professional development	4.10	0.80	Agree
7	Sufficient strategic interventions and collaborative efforts among stakeholders	3.65	2.00	Agree
8	Sufficient cross-sector partnerships among schools and communities	3.95	2.04	Agree
9	Sufficient student-led sustainability initiatives	3.80	1.90	Agree

The data in the table indicates that all the nine items on the factors influencing the adoption of sustainable practice in entrepreneurship programs have mean values above the cut-off point of 3.50, suggesting a general agreement among respondents on the factors influencing the adoption of sustainable practices in entrepreneurship programs. The standard deviations for these items range from 0.60 to 2.20, indicating relatively consistent responses among the participants. This consistency implies that the respondents' opinions are not widely dispersed and there is a shared understanding of the key factors influencing the adoption of sustainable practices. The descriptive results reveal a strong consensus among respondents on the importance of leadership support, funding, institutional policies, and industry collaboration in fostering sustainable practices in entrepreneurship programs. The consistency in responses and the lack of significant differences between lecturers and instructors highlight a unified perspective on the key factors driving the adoption of sustainable practices in EE programs.

Discussion of Findings

The findings from the analysis of sustainable practices of entrepreneurship education (EE) programs in south-eastern Nigeria according to research question 1 revealed that all items related to need for sustainable practices of table 1 had their mean values all above the cut-off point of 3.50, suggesting a strong agreement among respondents on need for sustainable practice in entrepreneurship programs. This highlights a widespread recognition of the benefits of sustainable practice in EE programs. The implication of this is that sustainable practices of entrepreneurship programs work towards mitigating economic challenges in Nigeria. This finding aligns with the work of Kolb et al. (2017), who emphasized that sustainable practices in EE go a long way in providing for economic development and reduction of operational costs and increasing funding opportunities. This finding is also supported by Scott (2013), which demonstrated that sustainable practices in EE education led to better economic outcomes for both students and institutions by fostering employability and financial stability.

The analysis of the research question 2 table 3 identified 10 key strategies that should be adopted to ensure sustainable practice in entrepreneurship programs in south eastern universities. Strategies such as professional development, industry partnerships, among others

were all rated accepted by respondents. The implication is that these strategies if adopted in entrepreneurship programs of Nigerian universities will go a long way to mitigating economic challenges in Nigeria. This aligns with the study of Bessant et al. (2015), that noted that continuous curriculum updates and strong industry partnerships are crucial for maintaining the relevance of EE education programs. Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) emphasizes that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. It argues that learning is a continuous process where learners engage in concrete experiences, reflect on them, form abstract concepts, and apply these in real-life situations.

The finding of the study of research question 3, table 5 reveals that the nine items had their means above 3.50 which identified the acceptance of the items as the factors that influences the adoption of sustainable practices in entrepreneurship programs. These factors include awareness and availability of resources among others. The indication of this is that these factors if not investigated will hinder implementation of sustainable practice of entrepreneurship in Nigerian universities and economic growth of the country. This is in line with the work of Fullan (2007) that emphasizes the availability of resources in EE education is super necessary for successful economic development of a nation. More so, the finding is in line with the work of Tilbury and Wortman (2004), which highlighted that educational awareness is a factor that effects sustainability in education and the growth of a nation.

Conclusion

This study has highlighted the critical role of sustainable practices of entrepreneurship education (EE) programs in south eastern Nigeria towards the economic challenges in Nigeria. The findings narrated the several strategies of adopting sustainable practices in EE education in south eastern and the factors that influences the adoption of sustainable practices towards economic challenges in Nigeria. It is therefore recommended that these strategies such as enhancing curriculum alignment with industry needs, promoting faculty development in sustainability, strengthening industry partnerships among others should be followed for essential sustainable practices in entrepreneurship programs towards economic challenges in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Entrepreneurship education stakeholders should collectively provide the necessary resources that will enhance sustainable practices in universities
2. Entrepreneurship education stakeholders should organize capacity building training for update of their skills and knowledge towards sustainable practices.
3. Entrepreneurship education curriculum should be revisited to incorporate innovative skill for enhancing sustainable practices in Nigeria universities.

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