Rebranding Entrepreneurship Education in Nigerian Polytechnics: A Systematic Approach for Solving Youth Unemployment

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Abstract
Employers are increasingly valuing entrepreneurial skills, an innovative mindset, risk tolerance, and self-direction, alongside technical expertise, in the rapidly changing 21st-century economy. Nigerian tertiary institutions have introduced Technical and Vocational Education to equip graduate and undergraduate students with the entrepreneurial skills needed to create jobs and reduce unemployment. Despite efforts to incorporate entrepreneurship education (EE) into polytechnic curricula, its implementation remains mostly theoretical and disconnected from actual market demands, as many graduates' face underemployment or unemployment after graduation. The problem arises from the traditional focus of entrepreneurship education on technical knowledge alone, with insufficient emphasis on skill development and nurturing an entrepreneurial mindset—both critical for turning skills into viable micro-enterprises or start-ups. This often leaves graduates unprepared to adapt, innovate, and generate employment opportunities independently. This paper highlights the need to rebrand the entrepreneurship education curriculum in Nigerian polytechnics from a knowledge-based approach to a skill-oriented one as a strategy to combat youth unemployment in Nigeria and similar contexts. Using the Federal Polytechnic of Oil and Gas Bonny, Rivers state, as a case study, the research analyzes empirical evidence to assess the impact of a skill-focused entrepreneurship education on reducing youth unemployment. The findings suggest that entrepreneurship courses in Nigerian polytechnics lack the practical skills necessary for job creation. Based on these empirical results, the paper recommends that polytechnics realign their entrepreneurship curricula with market needs, skills, and entrepreneurial competencies. The proposed framework aims not only to improve employment rates but also to promote self-employment, innovation, and economic resilience among Nigerian youth.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurship education, polytechnics education, skills development, self-employment, curriculum reform, and systematic approach.*

INTRODUCTION

Youth unemployment remains one of Nigeria's most urgent socio-economic challenges, with serious effects on poverty, insecurity, and sustainable growth. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2024), the youth unemployment rate is around 33.5%, while underemployment impacts an additional 21.9% of the population aged 15–34. This situation has led to a generation of graduates who, despite having technical or professional qualifications, cannot find meaningful jobs or start their businesses. The consequences are extensive, including increased dependency ratios, economic stagnation, rising social vices, and reduced national productivity.

Entrepreneurship education was incorporated into Nigeria's tertiary education curriculum by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) in the early 2000s. However, over the years, it has faced criticism for being overly theoretical, disconnected from practical realities, and underfunded. This is because the current model lacks a clear entrepreneurial focus, industry links, and a competency-based framework, leading to graduates who are certificate-rich but skill-poor.

Polytechnics are required to produce technically skilled manpower capable of driving industrialization, yet many graduates remain unemployed due to a mismatch between academic preparation and labour market realities. The traditional approach to entrepreneurship education in these institutions is often too theoretical, outdated, and poorly aligned with industry needs, which has not delivered the transformative impact needed to address this crisis. Rebranding entrepreneurship education offers a promising pathway to reverse this trend. In this study, rebranding means more than just renaming courses or making minor curriculum changes; it signifies a systematic and holistic reform that integrates practical, industry-driven, and innovation-oriented approaches into the learning process. This includes overhauling curricula, embedding project-based learning, fostering industry partnerships, strengthening faculty capacity, incorporating digital and emerging technologies, and providing access to incubated facilities and start-up investment funding.

A systematic approach to rebranding entrepreneurship education in Nigerian polytechnics can directly influence employment outcomes by equipping graduates not just with technical know-how but with the mindset, skills, and resources to start and sustain businesses or to become highly employable in competitive job markets. Global examples from countries such as Singapore, Finland, and South Korea demonstrate that when entrepreneurship education is integrated with robust, practice-based entrepreneurship training, graduates become active contributors to economic growth through job creation and innovation.

Nigeria's polytechnics have traditionally focused on technical and vocational training; however, the rising youth unemployment crisis highlights the urgent need for curriculum innovation and a systematic rebranding of entrepreneurship education within Nigerian polytechnics, aiming to create job creators rather than just job seekers. In this context, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) has gained attention as a strategic tool for youth empowerment by offering practical, hands-on skills in fields like carpentry, ICT, agriculture, fashion design, and mechanics to connect entrepreneurship education with self-employment (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2023).

Therefore, repositioning entrepreneurship education in Nigerian polytechnics is not just an academic reform; it is an urgent economic intervention aimed at transforming the nation's youth from job seekers to job creators. This study explores how rebranding entrepreneurship education, as an independent variable, can influence youth employment outcomes, ultimately offering a systematic solution to Nigeria's persistent unemployment challenge.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Polytechnics, by their mandate, are expected to produce graduates equipped with the practical and technical skills necessary for industrial and entrepreneurial activities. In response to the unemployment crisis, entrepreneurship education was introduced into Nigerian polytechnic curricula as a strategic measure to promote self-employment and job creation. However, despite more than a decade of implementation, the intended outcomes have largely fallen short. Many graduates still lack the entrepreneurial competencies, innovative capacity, and market-driven skills needed to create or secure decent work. Without urgent and evidence-based reforms, polytechnic graduates will continue to enter an already saturated labour market ill-prepared for self-reliance or competitive employment, further deepening the youth unemployment crisis.

There is limited empirical research on how rebranding entrepreneurship education can significantly influence youth employment outcomes in Nigerian polytechnics. However, a systematic approach involving curriculum innovation, experiential learning platforms, industry partnerships, technology integration, department capacity building, and targeted start-up support has the potential to bridge the gap between training and employability.

This study, therefore, seeks to investigate how systematic rebranding of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian polytechnics can serve as an effective strategy for reducing youth unemployment and fostering job creation among Nigerian Youths.

STATEMENT OF HYPOTHESIS

i. There will be a significant relationship between the quality of entrepreneurship education and the employability of polytechnic graduates.
ii. The current entrepreneurship curriculum does not equip students with practical business skills.
iii. Rebranding entrepreneurship education as hands-on skills will greatly boost youth self-employment rates.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurship Education: In the Nigerian context, entrepreneurship education has been integrated into tertiary institutions by the National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) as a response to high graduate unemployment (Oviawe, 2020). However, the challenge remains in converting theoretical content into practical entrepreneurial results.

The term "entrepreneurship education" describes an organised educational initiative and programs designed to provide people with the information, abilities, mindsets, and drive needed to discover, assess, and seize business opportunities. It includes a variety of instructional techniques intended to promote risk-taking, creativity, invention, business acumen, and the growth of entrepreneurial mindsets at different official and informal educational levels.

In practice, entrepreneurship education usually covers areas such as business planning, financial literacy, innovation management, opportunity recognition, and entrepreneurial finance, delivered through various teaching methods, including experiential learning, case studies, business simulations, mentorship programs, and real-world projects. Therefore, aligning TVET with entrepreneurship education offers a transformative opportunity. It not only empowers youth to become job creators but also enhances national resilience by encouraging innovation, micro-enterprise growth, and community-based economic development.

The European Commission (2020) asserts that entrepreneurship education involves more than just starting businesses; it also emphasizes developing entrepreneurial skills such as

initiative, leadership, and critical thinking—all of which are essential for success in any professional environment.

Also, entrepreneurship education is not merely about teaching students how to start businesses; rather, it involves fostering an entrepreneurial mindset that promotes creativity, problem-solving, resilience, adaptability in dynamic socio-economic environments, the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies necessary to identify opportunities, mobilize resources, take calculated risks, and create value through innovative ventures and a World Bank report (2023) shows that structured entrepreneurship education programs can increase the likelihood of graduates engaging in self-employment by over 35%**.**

In addition, the rebranding of entrepreneurship education also involves integrating digital resources, interdisciplinary approaches, and experiential learning. To reduce youth unemployment and promote economic growth, this study presents a systematic framework for rebranding entrepreneurial instruction in Nigerian polytechnics.

Interaction Between Self-Employment and Skills Development

The relationship between self-employment and skills development is both bidirectional and mutually reinforcing. Self-employment is increasingly viewed as a practical pathway to economic empowerment, innovation, and sustainable livelihoods.

Empirical evidence indicates that integrating strong skills training into self-employment programs boosts business survival rates. According to a World Bank (2023) study in Sub-Saharan Africa, micro-entrepreneurs with structured vocational and entrepreneurial training experienced 34% higher income growth compared to those without such training. Therefore, the relationship between self-employment and skills development forms a mutually beneficial cycle: skills enable individuals to start and run their businesses, while self-employment encourages ongoing learning and innovation. Enhancing this cycle—through targeted training, supportive policies, and resource access—can greatly aid job creation, poverty reduction, and economic resilience.

Beyond merely occupational training, skills development in today's knowledge-driven economy now encompasses a comprehensive mix of technical expertise, digital literacy, creativity, problem-solving skills, and soft skills like teamwork and communication. These skills are vital for self-employed individuals to effectively manage limited resources, navigate competitive markets, and adapt to changing client demands. Skills are the foundation and driving force behind self-employment. People with strong skill sets are more likely to start successful businesses, attract clients, maintain quality standards, and expand their operations. Conversely, self-employment often offers a practical environment for applying, refining, and broadening talents. This creates a cyclical relationship where success in self-employment stems from skills, and working independently further sharpens those skills through real-world experiences.

Research by Ogunyomi & Bruning (2021) shows that those who receive hands-on entrepreneurial training are more likely to start and expand their businesses. Building employability, productivity, and inclusive economic growth all rely on skill development, which includes soft, technical, vocational, and cognitive skills that enable people to participate in the labour market or create their enterprises.

CURRICULUM REFORM AS A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH

Curriculum reform involves revisiting, re-aligning, and redesigning educational content, pedagogy, and delivery systems to meet modern economic and social realities. According to Fullan (2019), effective curriculum reform is student-centred, competency-based, and outcome-driven.

In polytechnic institutions, a systematic approach involves aligning entrepreneurship goals with institutional missions, engaging employers in curriculum design, and establishing a feedback loop through monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (Adebayo & Kolawole, 2022). Such an approach ensures that reforms are sustainable, scalable, and impactful in addressing unemployment and promoting national development. Additionally, a systematic approach to curriculum reform, entrepreneurial education, and skill development requires using a coordinated, evidence-based, and comprehensive methodology for implementing change. According to Gibb (2005), entrepreneurial education should be integrated into an institutional plan that includes policy alignment, department development, resource allocation, and stakeholder involvement, rather than being implemented in isolation.

Additionally, a methodical approach involves curriculum revision, policy support, stakeholder participation, planning, and ongoing assessment. It moves beyond isolated interventions to a comprehensive, interconnected framework that ensures entrepreneurship education is project- and skill-based, outcome-driven, and produces measurable results. It also fosters industry partnerships for incubation, internships, and mentorship, facilitated by functional entrepreneurship development centres (EDCs). Students are exposed to real-world problems and equipped with the tools needed to develop scalable solutions within this supportive environment.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Experiential Learning Theory by David A. Kolb (1984)

According to the theory, learning occurs most effectively when people actively participate in a cycle of experience, introspection, conceptualization, and experimentation. Because of its experiential nature, entrepreneurship requires practical learning, real-world problem solving, and constant repetition. Nigerian polytechnics' traditional entrepreneurship instruction is mainly theoretical, and the theory supports the need for rebranding by promoting real-world projects, action learning, and business simulations. This includes case studies, internships, and student-led projects, fostering resilience, creativity, and self-confidence through trial-and-error learning techniques. Students will develop practical skills, moving beyond memorization to engage in real-world entrepreneurship.

Opportunity-Based Entrepreneurship Theory by Peter Drucker (1985), Shane & Venkataraman (2000)

This theory assumes that entrepreneurship involves the process of identifying, evaluating, and exploiting opportunities in society. Entrepreneurs are individuals who can spot gaps in the market and mobilize resources to fill them. This theory supports the idea that rebranded entrepreneurship education must ensure it achieves these objectives.

i. Teach students how to identify and exploit business opportunities,
ii. Encourage innovation, creativity, and proactive behaviour and,
iii. Focus on problem-solving as a means of job creation.

The emphasis here is that a curriculum designed with opportunity identification in mind can stimulate entrepreneurial thinking and create a generation of opportunity-driven youth entrepreneurs, particularly in high-potential sectors like agribusiness, ICT, and creative industries. Hence, a combination of Experiential Learning Theory and Opportunity-Based Entrepreneurship Theory will provide a strong theoretical foundation for understanding and implementing a systematic rebranding of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian polytechnics.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Ojeifo (2022) used survey data on the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian polytechnics from five institutions across South-West Nigeria. The results showed

that 62% of students believed entrepreneurship education was too theoretical**,** lacking experiential learning and real-life business exposure. Only 18% of respondents expressed confidence in starting their own business after graduation.

According to a National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) survey conducted countrywide in 2023, more than 70% of polytechnics did not have access to start-up funds for students or operating business incubation centres. Furthermore, the majority of institutions' EE curricula had not been revised in more than five years, and they were poorly suited to agribusiness, digital entrepreneurship, and Nigeria's unorganized sector. A comprehensive rebranding of entrepreneurship education requires both curriculum reform and institutional retooling.

Adeola and Okechukwu (2021) conducted a mixed-method study on how educator capacity affects the impact of entrepreneurship education. Findings from 12 polytechnics showed that lecturers with industry experience and entrepreneurship training produced significantly better student outcome**s** in terms of idea generation, business plan development, and start-up interest. The study recommended continuous professional development and collaboration between industry and academia**.** Implication**:** Rebranding EE requires not just curriculum innovation but capacity building for educators to improve delivery and mentorship.

The above empirical studies indicated that entrepreneurship education (EE) in Nigerian polytechnics holds significant potential for addressing youth unemployment, but its current implementation faces systemic gaps in content relevance, delivery methods, and institutional support. These deficiencies reduce students' confidence and readiness to launch viable ventures upon graduation. A holistic rebranding approach can only transform EE from a theoretical exercise into a practical engine for innovation, job creation, and sustainable economic growth in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a survey design, and a sample of 204 undergraduate students from Federal Polytechnic of Oil and Gas, Bonny, was selected from a total population of 417 undergraduate students using Taro Yamani's formula. The selected sample consists of 119 males and 85 females who are currently on their one-year industrial training. However, a 20-item structured questionnaire rated on a 4-point Likert scale was used to collect data from the respondents, while both Pearson Product-Moment analysis and One-Sample T-test were employed to analyse the hypothesis.

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

Table 1.1: Showing the Reliability and Validity of the Instrument

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha
Quality of Entrepreneurship Education (QEE)	0.73
Employability Index (EI)	0.81
Rebranding Entrepreneurship Education to hands-on skills (REE)	0.79
Interest in Self-Employment (ISE)	0.70
Perceived adequacy of current entrepreneurship curriculum (PAC)	0.83

One-Sample Test

	Test Value = 12					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower	Upper
Perception of Entrepreneurship Curriculum	-2.628	203	.014	-1.00000	-1.7783	-.2217

The result of the Cronbach Alpha Analysis indicated that the 5-sectional 20-item questionnaire used in this study was all reliable and valid at a 0.73 coefficient for QEE, 0.81 for EI, 0.79 for REE, 0.70 for ISE, and 0.83 coefficient for PAC.

Table 1.2: showing the relationship between the Quality of entrepreneurship education and the employability of Polytechnic graduates.

		Quality of entrepreneurship education	Employability index
Quality of entrepreneurship education	Pearson Correlation	1	.531**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.009
	N	204	204
Employability index	Pearson Correlation	.531**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	
	N	204	204

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The result of Table 1.2 above shows that there is a significant relationship between the Quality of entrepreneurship education and the employability of Polytechnic graduates at r = .531, p< .009.

Table 1.3: showing a T-Test Analysis

One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Perception of Entrepreneurship Curriculum	204	11.0000	2.08443	.38056

The result of the T-test analysis above showed that the sample mean is 11.00 and the P-value is .014 is less than our significance level of 0.05, which is -2.628. This signifies that the current entrepreneurship curriculum does not equip learners with practical skills.

Table 1.4: showing the relationship between the Rebranding entrepreneurship education and Interest in self-employment

		Rebranding entrepreneurship education	Interest in Self-employment
Rebranding entrepreneurship education	Pearson Correlation	1	.851**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	204	204
Interest in Self-employment	Pearson Correlation	.851**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	204	204

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The result of Table 1.4 correlation above also shows that there is a significant relationship between Rebranding entrepreneurship education and Interest in Self-employment at r = .851, p< .000. level.

RECOMMENDATION

The study recommendations are as follows to enable the rebranding of entrepreneurship education in Nigerian polytechnics:

1. **Curriculum and Pedagogy Overhaul:**
   This entails incorporating hands-on skills, project-based entrepreneurship courses that give students practical business knowledge. During their studies, these classes need to inspire students to recognise regional business prospects, create workable business ideas, and carry out small-scale operations. Because it fosters creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, project-based learning (PBL) is especially successful. In order to replicate real entrepreneurial experiences, learners participate in simulations and real-world business difficulties, frequently collaborating in groups to discover solutions. According to research, PBL in vocational education greatly increases start-up success and entrepreneurial intent (Ndung'u & Wanjiku, 2022; UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2023).
2. **Experiential Learning & Incubation:**
   The term "experiential learning" is a learning-by-doing method in entrepreneurship education where students acquire business skills through hands-on experiences rather than only lectures in the classroom. When combined with incubation, it forms a comprehensive pipeline that ensures graduates leave polytechnics with operating, profitable firms, spanning from ideation to venture launch and early growth.
3. **Industry and community linkages:**
   To examine the curriculum every year, each faculty member with an active employer should form an Industry Advisory Board. Make public-private training partnerships (PPTPs) and apprenticeships official by establishing specific MOUs and learning goals. Collaborate with chambers of commerce, local governments, and vocational/technical groups to gain access to markets and internships. Obtain a variety of funding sources, including donation programs, government seed grants, commercial sector sponsorships, and income-generating services via consultancy services.
4. **Establishing Innovation Centres in TVET Institutions:**
   TVET institutions must develop into innovative ecosystems as well as training facilities. Establishing innovation centres or entrepreneurial hubs on campuses can give students the room, resources, and encouragement they need to transform their ideas into

successful enterprises. These centres ought to provide: • Programs for business incubation and acceleration; • Prototyping tools and digital fabrication (such as 3D printers and design labs); • Connections to venture capital, microloans, and seed funding; and • Networking and mentoring opportunities with regional business owners and industry participants.

5. **Policy Incentives:**
   Providing Graduate Entrepreneurs with Start-Up Assistance, Tax Relief, and Grants Support from policy is essential to sustaining and growing youth entrepreneurship outside of the classroom. Governments ought to implement entrepreneur-friendly laws that facilitate the establishment and expansion of businesses by TVET graduates. Among these programs are seed money and start-up incentives for business concepts nurtured during training, for young people's micro and small businesses in their first two to three years, tax holidays or other reliefs public procurement quotas, which enable firms led by graduates to compete for government contracts, simplified procedures for young entrepreneurs in terms of business registration and regulations.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis in table 1.2, and 1.4 that signify a positive relationship between Quality of entrepreneurship education, and employability of Polytechnic graduates; and Rebranding entrepreneurship education and interest in self-employment respectively, the study thereby concludes that a detailed and quality entrepreneurship education with practical skill knowledge has a positive influence on impacting graduates with innovative spirit of self-employment or increasing their likelihood of creating jobs.

However, based on the T-test analysis in Table 1.3, the study also maintained that the current polytechnic entrepreneurship training curriculum does not equip students with practical knowledge and thereby requires rebranding or readjustment to involve practical skills that will help improve the employment prospects of polytechnic graduates.

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